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TRIAL AND TRIUMPH.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE BLACKSMITH'S DAUGHTER." "THE GOLD-BEATER," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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TRIAL AND TRIUMPH.

CHAPTER I.

A PROPOSAL AND A DEPARTURE.

The family of the Myrtles was daily becoming a more pleasant home for Lucille. She found the children affectionate and tractable, so she lavished time and attention unsparingly upon them, and if her own thoughts would have allowed her she might have been happy, but she could not forbid them to come and occupy her mind, stirring up such unpleasant associations, that they terrified her. She felt herself the depository of one terrible secret,

having no doubt on her mind, that the man who called himself her father, knew all the circumstances connected with the death of Mrs. Lampton. Was it his hand that dealt the blow? This question made her look in her own mind as criminal as the murderer, whoever he might be. This struggle was constant within her. She could not banish the thoughts always filling her mind. Night and day it haunted her, and she began to feel that it was criminal to strive and defend herself by a secret, which she should have disclosed. But then this man was her father, was he? She was harrassed, agitated, annoyed, and this question raising a doubt, served to make her look at her conduct in a still worse light.

The family of the Myrtles knew nothing about her, for Lady Myrtle had taken her on trust accepting Mrs. Lumsden's introduction as a sufficient guarantee for her conduct and efficiency. She had been asked no questions, but left to her own will, and she strove to keep

the character she felt Mrs. Lumsden must have given her. Days had passed since Rob's visit, and moving little out unless to walk or drive with Lady Myrtle and the children, for lady Myrtle wished always to have her with her in her drives for business or pleasure, she knew little of what was going on.

They were all at breakfast the morning after the robbery at Lord Shapland's. Sir George was in a perpetual hurricane, and her ladyship, very mild and rather languid, while Lucille made tea. The newspapers had not been opened, for Sir George was deep in all the culinary mysteries before him, and he preferred solids to politics just then, stopping the storm which occasionally raged out by the more important duty of taking his breakfast. That ended at last, and he picked up *The Times*. He did not care much for home politics, so he was throwing down the paper, as there was nothing Indian in it of any importance, when he stopped.

"Eh? What this?"

"What?" asked her ladyship, listlessly, while Lucille went on with her own business of tea making.

"A robbery at Lord Shapland's. You know him, Lady Myrtle. We met him somewhere. Don't you remember?" He was reading to himself, while he asked these questions, and the voice was not so loud.

"I remember him, Sir George. What about him?"

"It's only a case of burglary. Some people have gotten into the house, and removed money, jewels, and a great many other things of value. That's all. No Indian news I see," and he threw down the paper, which her ladyship lifted, and read a long report of what had occurred, mixed with much that had not. There was not a word in all this lost upon Lucille. Suspicions crept into her mind which she could not discard. Her father was intimate with Lord Shapland. She knew that.

The report said that the robbery must have been committed by some person conversant with the premises, from the manner it had been carried out, and that suspicion was directed to a particular individual. She could only fancy her father to be this person. It was another drop of bitterness in her cup, almost then overflowing.

Sir George was reading his letters, not minding what was going on about him, her ladyship occupied by the paper, and Lucille putting things out of her way, preparatory to going to her school-room, when a servant entered to inform her that a gentleman was in the dining-room waiting to see her. Who was this? She rose and went down, and saw Mr. Lampton. She was about to go away again, but he came forward very humbly to her, though he did not seem to have forgotten any of his arts for captivation, as he was as new and glossy and fashionably-black as he had ever before been. He bowed very

respectfully, and stood with his hat in his hand, quite undecided-looking, and how to treat him was just then a difficulty in the young girl's way, or even to know what he wanted, was, with her, a matter of some enquiry.

"I know I should not come near you," he said. "I feel myself quite unworthy in your presence, but then I was totaly beside myself, and did not know what I was about. I am become sensible now, and my eyes are opened." He gave a gentle sigh. It put her in mind of the scene at Beechcroft, and not knowing him, she answered very coldly.

"It would have been better had you not come, as our connexion has terminated, and your presence produces irritating feelings."

"That is it. I know it. I am vile, very criminal, and weak. I was imposed upon, deceived."

"I do not understand you."

"You could not. With a fatuity I threw

myself in your way, and felt the charm of your presence, then I wasn't my own master. You conquered chanced,me. That was it."

"And you came to tell me this?" she asked, retreating from him. "You carry your insults into this house."

"No, no," he said, interrupting her. "I did not come for that. I had another object in view, but my feelings have latterly carried me often too far, as they did now. I came to ask you to pardon me in the first place for the wrong I did you."

"I am bound to forgive," said Lucille, coldly.

"That I expected from your kindness, but I want more—much more than that. By accident I learned circumstances which at first I would have been better not to have known, yet now, when I think of them, I cannot tell how I allowed myself to be so deceived."

"I would wish, Mr. Lampton," Lucille said,

" that you should directly state your business with me. I have not time to spend in unmeaning conversation, and I do not feel inclined to prolong it with you."

" I see it, see it. You do not forgive me."

She went now to the door; but Mr. Lampton followed her to it. " You will pardon me. I must tell it, no matter what is the result." She turned round to him, and he went on with a very slight tremor in his voice— " You cannot imagine how lonely and uncomfortable I am. The poor little girls feel it so much too, and I want happiness and a home."

" Well," said Lucille, shortly.

" You can confer both on me. You can make my house a real home, be everything to me in it, and make the dear children happy."

" Sir !" She looked at him with lightning in her eyes.

" My unfortunate head," he said, interrupting her suddenly before she could get beyond the first word, and she stood as it was almost

rooted to the floor. "I mean as my wife. I would raise you into the place poor Mrs. Lampton occupied."

"Your wife!" The words came hissing from between her lips. "Your wife! You will oblige me, Mr. Lampton by terminating this visit, and never making another."

"You refuse that, do you?" He looked at her with open eyes.

"Good morning, sir. Once before you bitterly insulted me, and now you add mockery, more galling, to insult."

"I mean it. I do."

"No doubt. Yet I would marry the poorest labourer in this wide city, sooner than the man whose murdered wife is not four months dead, until he forgets the respect due to her by making an empty proposal to another. You must leave this, sir."

"And you refuse me?"

She turned from him, opened the door, and walked out, leaving him alone. She could

not certainly comprehend this proposition, and she went up stairs, not even looking at him, nor thinking that he was behind her, so completely was she disgusted with this. Yet, she thought he had a meaning behind it all, and that he had no inclination to make this proposition at first, though he had done it. She was hardly into her school-room, when another message was brought to her. Some one else wished to see her, and this time she fancied she saw something peculiar in the look of the servant. Perhaps it was a surmise only, but she went down stairs and into the dining-room. A man was standing before the fire wearing a large cloth cloak. He had a thick black moustache upon his lip, and a long black beard under his chin. He was dressed very much in a foreign way, and strove to look very foreign, his complexion being a very dark shade. Lucille could not make him out. He held a broad-leaved hat in his hand,

and in presence of the servant bowed very low to her.

"You wished to see me, sir," she said, when the servant was gone.

"Good, good this," exclaimed a voice, she knew at once and it made her tremble. "What a wise hinfant it be, that don't know its own father, cos he's come it a bit furrin like. Eh Luce? You doesn't know me?"

"I do now."

"Well then, don't be goin it too strong, as this is our last meetin here for longer than you thinks. I'm goin to see Paris, and don't mind ever to come back. You'll be a-cryin now, wont you?"

"No. I shall be happy at the relief," she said, at once.

"I knowed that too, but a feller often hasks what he knows just, it may be, sposin he might be mistaken a bit, but I isn't. You don't care you ever sees your poor father again."

"Why should I?"

"There an't no great reason why. I owns that at once, but then when one's leavin his own flesh an blood arter him, he has some touch of feelin."

"You have none. I know too the cause of all this."

"Of what?" he asked, abruptly.

"This masquerading here. It is disguise after crime."

"What are you arter now?"

"You claim me," she said bitterly, "and every moment, you sink me deeper and deeper. I know it all."

"I sees it now," he said, with a laugh, "so you hard it, and s'pects me. Well now if that an't like a man's own. You doesn't love your father no how."

"God preserves me from hating him."

"A dutiful gal, no doubt, but I can't come to talk in this here way. I'm goin to France and I wants information afore I starts. You as good as said that you wasn't mine, now I

wants to know what makes you be thinkin that."

"I shall keep my information to myself," she said, resolutely. "I know I am not your daughter."

"Course then you knows whose you is."

"I shall guard my own secrets," she repeated.

"Now, Luce," he said, after a long pause, looking at her attentively, and striving to penetrate her designs. "I'm got up for furrin travel. You sees I'm fust rate in the hair and whisker line, an if them uns on t'other side treats me with feelin I'll be a stayin with em, an never come near you no more. I'll let you into a bit of a secret too, which might sarve you, that is if you tells me somut of yer own mind on this business."

"I shall confide nothing to you," she said, at once. "I shall not join you in anything, and what I know I keep to myself."

"If I said you wasn't mine?" he observed, after an irresolute pause.

"That I believe."

"If I'd put you on that way of findin it out."

"I shall make that discovery for myself."

"Now, Luce, you're a ruinin yerself. I always thinks you's mine, and I knows it now. You was tryin me an strivin to shake me hoff, but it won't do, so when I comes back I'll find you—that I'll do."

"You know," she said, "what I stated before, when you threatened me. I say the same now. Leave me to myself."

He strove to laugh at her, but evidently he was afraid, for he got up, and drew his cloak round him, and assumed all the foreign air that hair and peculiarly cut clothes could give him, not badly either, since there seemed something about him then that impressed Lucille with the notion that he had played that character before. She stood silently before him, and he was silent too.

"Well I'm hoff," he said, at last, "an you doesn't look by no means grieved neither."

"I do not look what I do not feel. But as long as I have a thought that you are related to me, so long I shall give to you the assistance within my power that your necessities may require, beyond that, nothing. I can have no respect for you. That is impossible."

This terminated the meeting. Lucille went again to her school-room, and her father to the street. He had a cab at the end of it into which he got, not venturing to walk far, and even slouching his hat over his face, and drawing up the collar of his cloak before the driver, as if he dreaded even his recognition. The cab was driven away. The freight leaned well back in it. hiding himself as much as he could, and never lifting his head to look out. The cab went along through many respectable streets, until at last it made a sort of plunge into an out-of-the-way locality, and here it was stopped, the freight getting out and paying the fare. Rob walked slowly on, until he came to an humble-looking coffee-house, and

here he entered. He ordered coffee and a chop, lifted a newspaper, burying himself behind it, and there he remained. He read over all the account of the robbery at Lord Shapland's, a faint smile on his face while he did it, though now and then he trembled a little. There he sat until evening came, and then night. With the deepening darkness he seemed to have more sympathy, for he crept away under its shade, rolling his cloak over his arm, and looking out more erect upon the life before him.

CHAPTER II.

SURPRISED AND TAKEN.

THERE was the old scene in Mother Fippin's neighbourhood. The same struggling, wrangling, the same loud voices, and warring words. There was not a change there. The locality was iron-girt, for no foreign power, repugnant to its vices, modes, or precepts, had yet entered it. The law walked feebly along in a blue coat with bright buttons, and wearing a glazed-crowned hat to cover its nervousness, for it was shaky there when only present

in the spirit or the person of a single policeman, who hardly interfered with the habits of the neighbourhood, and passed his time much in drawing on his gloves or shifting his cape. Yet round it then did the law cautiously arrange its force. Rumors had come to its ears, and the long hands with their iron fingers were stretched out, while heavy feet and strong frames even then approached to do its mission. The place did not feel this yet. Its senses were not on the alert, so on it went as usual, and in the deep shades of the night, the gas flamed, the reckless ones crept in and out, and Mother Fippin pulled and pulled, the handle never idle, while Jerry's labours were a constant run from the bar to the parlour, or the tap-room and back again.

In their old room were then assembled the usual gang. There was an addition to it. A very old man sat near the Bang, and opposite to him was Rob, clean-shaved on lip and chin, for the foreign ornaments were gone. This

old man was brown and dusky. His head was covered with the remains of an old brown wig, and a little circle of white hair came down from his ears joining in a peculiar tuft under his chin. You could see his eyes, yellow and feline, the lids tipped by a red streak, glare out upon the men near him, not that he dreaded or cared for them, but just from the habit of associating with characters that required watching. The table was dotted with wet spots and chalk marks, as if Mother Fippin had entered her score on it and the debtors were continually rubbing it out, while this old man held a piece of chalk in his hand, now and then making a point or bar, and sometimes adding a figure to the marks on the table.

"I don't know, old Tilt," said the Driver, "how you makes it out, but it's cussed low. There warn't such a haul these months by; an you gives nothink for it at all."

"Try some one else," answered the old man,

chalking down a figure upon the dirty table. "You'll see their value then."

"That's it," said Rob. "He knows we can't try anywhere now, so he's a-makin as much as he can on it. That's it, old un. An't it?"

"I don't care for the lot at all," the old man replied; but there was avarice in his yellow eyes, twinkling and shining out—their red edges becoming still more red, and contradicting his words. "You can keep them, an I'll go. I can't say what brought me here."

"Make it fifty more."

"Not a copper." He was rising. There was a rapid signal amongst them, and Rob laid his hand gently on his shoulder.

"You must have 'em old un," he said.

"Where are they?" the old man asked.

"Here," said Rob, opening a secret drawer in the table, and lifting up a leather case. He opened it, and the old man looked half stupified over the flashing splendour of the

jewels within it—for they shone and glittered so brightly, that they dimmed his own sight. "A rare lot too, old un—rare. Isn't it?"

A tap outside now, and they all sprang to their feet, the Bang alone listlessly hearing what was going on, while Rob quickly closed the case, and held it firmly in his grasp. The door was opened, and Jerry poked in his head —but one word—"Police," and they made a rush to the door. Rob, by a peculiar instinct, pushed the jewel-case into his breast, just as the police had passed Mother Fippin's bar, and then he dropped behind, while the others pushed forward. There was a half-dozen of men on the outside—great-coated and belted—baton in hand, they held possession. The Bang clung next to Rob. He was silent and meditative, while the Driver made a rush for freedom, and was knocked down with a baton. Rob did not move.

"How many's of um?" asked a loud voice.

"Just four and this old un," answered one of the men.

"Bring him here." The old man was pushed forward. "You here, Tilt? So it's all up, is it?"

"I didn't touch one of them," said the old man, nervously. He had drawn down his hat over his eyes, and Mother Fippin stood trembling behind him, while the other loungers in the house looked on silently.

"That I know—" one of the men interrupted and spoke to the officer. The crowd was gathering rapidly outside. "Handcuff them." Rob presented his hands at once. "You're impatient," said the man.

"Why, when a man's hinnocent, there an't no use in standin here till they has time outside to get up a row. So I thinks it right to get on."

The Bang grumbled something, and they were all presently handcuffed. The door was opened. There was a mob round outside,

dark and lowering-looking, men, women, and boys; and it moved slowly away, until the police got their prisoners arranged, the officer bringing up the rear with Rob. His immediate submission had found favor. The mob moved sullenly, and the handcuffed prisoners gloomily through it. Some one said "that it was a shame."

"It's all a mistake," exclaimed Rob, "an only a night's hard board for nothink, so don't mind us. We'll be out in the mornin." The mob received this without gratitude. It still gathered close about the prisoners.

The officer looked closer at Rob. He did not apprehend danger, notwithstanding the symptoms. "I don't think you will," he said.

"Nor me neither," Rob answered, "nor I doesn't care neither. I'm goin it at last, and doesn't want to stop it."

"How?"

"Why, I spose, my time's up, an I'm tired of these parts. I doesn't like the life neither."

"They'll hang you," said the other, shortly.

"Not for this here."

"No. But there's another charge. Keep off, my friends. Keep off, the crowd there. Get along, men, will you ?"

"It's all the same," said Rob, despondingly. The mob still closed on them too, and they were treading through a net-work of dark alleys and filthy lanes, not improving either. Rob walked slowly and steadily. The officer's hand was on his collar, and the prisoner was feeble under his touch. Away in the distance there was a lamp, behind them now another, and the space between was dark enough. A few steps farther on a deep gullet opened on the narrow street.

"Take care, sir, take care," said Rob, in a low voice. "The stones are up there I thinks," and the officer still holding his man stoops for a second. A strong push with the

prisoner's shoulder, and he reeled, a blow with the bound hands together, and he tumbled in amongst the crowd, who stood between him in a second and the flying prisoner, who has rushed into the gullet and is gone. Speedily, rapidly he was off. The officer had gained his feet, and there was scuffling and jostling about the other prisoners, still the men held their ground there, and though the crowd swayed round them, they did not let them go, but Rob was away. The officer saw that pursuit was useless, while the Bang groaned aloud. The escaped one had the jewels with him.

Down this gullet Rob fled. He knew the way well, and when the sounds of the crowd behind him were no longer heard, and there was no audible track of pursuing feet, he stopped, breathless and handcuffed. He rubbed his fettered wrists against his hot face, well knowing that the danger was round him, and that escape was a problem not solved

as he then was. Slowly enough he went now close to the houses that skirted his way, tremblingly alive to his position.

"If these was away," he muttered to himself, "a feller would'nt be mindin the rest of it, but they is sadly against one." He took a desperate wrench at them then, and almost howled at the pain. "That won't do." His teeth nearly chattered in his head. "If I can get at it, all's likely to be right, and them uns isn't a bed yet."

He wound cautiously round the end of the lane into another, then another. The way was broader here, so he cowered under the sides of the houses waiting to spring across and get into another street, while he thought that the handcuffs shone most unpleasantly and very ill-timed in the glare of the lighted lamps. There was no obstruction yet though. He crossed without peril and was in a way safe, for in the crowded lanes into which he now entered there was less hope of detection.

At last he stopped at a door, and bending down looked through the key-hole. There was no trace of light, but he rapped, and could hear noise and shuffling feet. He rapped again. Now there was a step near the door, and then a voice was heard, asking what was wanted.

"Only a word from the old un," said Rob.

"What's it, then?"

"You thinks I'm a goin to tell it here, do you. Just hopen, Nobs, like a good un, an don't be keepin a feller standin here all night."

"But I doesn't know you," persisted the voice.

"Put your head down to the key-hole," and Rob bent and whispered through it. "You knows that." In a moment after the door was opened and Rob in the hall. "Shut up, Nobs, like a good un."

"It's you, is it?" and the voice proceeded from a brush of matted, tangled hair, with a great opening in the centre of it, garnished

with huge teeth, and coloured a bright purple, not a healthy red, while two dead spots at the point above it—now and then becoming a little brighter, and again nearly closing away —feebly showed themselves through the irregular openings in the human brushwood dangling about them. This head was mounted upon a low, misshapen trunk, that rather rolled in and out—not walking— but getting along in a sort of irregular jump, like a human sparrow, hopping its way through life, but very heavy in all its motions. "Why if that an't— Eh, old feller?"

"They has him," said Rob, pointing with both hands—and the iron bracelets shining in the light of the guttering candle the other held—"has him tight, Nobs; but then there an't nothink against him."

"Old Tilt?" asked Nobs.

"Him. I don't know how I'm here, an I'm a little done up too, but here I am, an I wants

these things off badly; so now, like a good un, don't be a keepin me standin here."

The figure raised the muddy light over its head, and went along the passage, up an old creaking staircase, and then into a forlorn-looking room, hardly with any furniture in it. There was a cloak hanging against the wall, which Rob pointed at with closed hands, and the figure took it down.

"Now, Nobs, what can you do with these here?" asked Rob.

The figure looked at them in a long, earnest contemplation, knowing their use, but not understanding how to remove them.

"I can't say." He handled the rivets, which were smooth under his touch, and then looked up into Rob's face with a sideling expression the other did not like. "How's it to be done?"

"The tools must be somewhere here," said Rob, anxiously. "The old un had everythink

the profession wanted, and they can't be far hoff."

"I don't knows em at all," said Nobs, his dull eyes striving to shine out from the midst of the tangled hair that hung about them. "He has nothink out, either—nothink at all, cos they be's all locked up."

Rob took another wrench at his gyves, but they were immovable; and while he almost groaned with pain, the dull eyes before him glistened. He made another effort, and this time he thought they were yielding, but in the struggle the leather case fell out of his bosom, and Nobs lifted it.

"Give me that, Nobs."

"What's in it? Let un see?" He opened it, and started at the glitter. The dull eyes were bright now. You could see them shining like stars in a dark sky. "First water. Old un calls em that. I knows em." He held them firmly in his hand.

"Give em here," said Rob.

"I won't though." The long, bony fingers were clutching round them like a vice, and the huge mouth wide and gaping.

"You won't? You says you won't?" The Devil was up, fresh and lively, in this man, who had risked so much for the glittering stones the other held fast. "But you will, though."

"Take em then," and Nobs dandled the box affectionately in his hand. "You can take em, can't you?" He was creeping towards the door. Rob sprang at him, the heavily-ironed hands descended on his head, and the steel cut into it deep, while the idiot face grew dark, and the figure tumbled down. Rob struck the prostrate body with his foot, and the case rolled out of its grasp. He stooped down to lift it up: while he did so the handcuffs creaked. He pulled at them violently, and they snapped in two. That violent blow had broken the rivets, and he was free. He rubbed his pained wrists, to which the broken metal

still clung, and then he hid the box securely in his breast, took down his cloak, and wrapped it round him. He was relieved now. Hardly glancing at the still lying body, not looking if it lived or was dead, he left the room and got down into the hall. He listened there for a time, without hearing a sound, and, cautiously unbolting the door, he got into the streets.

It was still deep, dark night, so he went along carefully, anxious to get at once into the open streets, believing there was less danger in them; and, muffled as he was, he would be less remarked than in the bye-places. He had reached an open thoroughfare at last, and felt relieved, so he turned towards the water, went slowly on until he came to a tavern near the river, and then he stopped, thinking for a time. This ended in his rapping and being admitted. He ordered a bed, and that closed the fatigues and dangers of that night.

CHAPTER III.

STRIVING TO MAKE FRIENDS.

Save on the evening of Lucille's first coming home to Sir George Myrtle's, she had not seen Florence since she came to London. Neither had sought the other. There was a barrier between them, which Lucille would not pass, and Florence did not appear to care to see her. In all the frequent communications that passed between Lucille and the Grange there was no allusion to this. M. Lemayne never referred to Florence in any other way than by stating that

letters had come from her, or that Mrs. Mapleton had written to her. He did not enter into any particulars about her. She was well. Lucille knew this. She came sometimes to Lady Myrtle's, but Lucille never came in her way. So there was a dead blank between them, and neither was inclined to fill it up.

With Lucille things went pleasantly enough, save the heart-burnings that so often rose from the presence of her father, but now came a new ordeal. The information that the men who had been suspected of robbing Lord Shapland's house were in the hands of the police, had reached the Myrtle residence. There were hints that heavier charges lay against them. One had escaped. She could not learn who this was. She felt the crisis was on her. There was agony in this. High and proudly had she held herself during her engagements. She had not stained her character, though she suffered much in its defence, and this intelligence came on her

like a shock. The felon's child would be an outcast. She knew so much of life as to feel this. All the past would be an useless sacrifice, for the world would not recognize her, if her relationship to this man came to its ears. For long past she had nursed a dreamy thought, which was now spurred into strong action, but how to put it in execution, or to attempt it, was her difficulty. This was in her head now that she was going to see Mrs. Lumsden. The old woman had been all to her. She would see her and mention to her this idea.

The old woman was not ill, but she seemed to be failing. She was becoming thinner and her colour a shade more yellow. Still she was as lively as ever, and had lost none of her conversational powers. Mortimer was much with her, reading and talking, telling her the *on dits* and news outside, how her friends got on, and sometimes managing some business for her, but that was seldom, for she did most

of this herself, having often long interviews with her solicitor. She was known to be rich, possessing the accumulations of a large fortune left to her by Mr. Lumsden, who was many years older than herself when she married him. Little more of her history was known, and though believed to be of very good family, her intimates learned nothing about her. They did not scrutinize her life, for most of them contemplated a succession to her wealth. She was worldly enough to know this.

She was now sitting in her chair as usual, while Lucille was preparing to go to see her. By her side then was Mr. Lampton, but she did not look much at him. She was rather tolerating him than otherwise, and he appeared very humble and submissive before her. He had been talking to her for some time, wiping his eyes with his perfumed handkerchief, and often too smoothing out his silky whiskers. Still in deep mourning,

though it did not sit well on him, with all his affectation of gravity and sorrow; he spoke in a very low tone, the old lady giving him now and then a quick, distrustful look, and after that, falling into her usual position.

"I had two objects, my dear madam," he was saying, "in coming here. The first to open up my mind to you on a very particular subject—the other to ask your advice and assistance."

"You should'nt then have thought of me at all, and when you remember our last meeting, I can't see why you came."

"That very occurrence is one reason."

"Then you should have staid at home. I know all about it, and your conduct—why, I can't get words for it."

"Nor I. But I did not know what I was about then. I have repented that. I have offered all the reparation in my power."

"What reparation?" She asked this languidly, as if tired.

"That is the point on which I ask your advice and assistance. I went to the young lady the other morning. I repeated to her my sorrow and repentance. I went as far as any man—none in my position would have done the same. I asked her to forget the past, and offered my hand and name to her—to her." There was a hard emphasis upon this last word.

"Well, well?" The old lady was roused up now. "What was in that?"

"My dear madam, you do not know who this Miss Roberts is."

"But I do though. She is a good, virtuous girl, beautiful and accomplished. Something fresh to look at and know, like a newly-pulled flower, wearing her beauty on her face without deceit within her."

"Her father, madam, is—"

"I know all that too. He's not as he should be. Can she help that? Did she make him what he is?" The old lady asked

these questions rapidly, leaning forward as she spoke. "Why, I'll tell you a bit of history. In a village town in Suffolk there was an attorney's office boy, his sweeper out, his fire lighter, a rogue, a knave, a swindler. Before he was twenty he had been turned loose on the world, without a character or a shilling. He was only fit for a penal settlement, or a jail. How he escaped these I don't know. I cannot tell you his subsequent history for a number of years, but I know he turned up here in London, come back from India, married and rich. He sat in Parliament. He was respected, and he was Frederick Lampton the first."

"My father?"

"Yours, sir," said the old lady, bitterly. "I can prove all I say, and yet you turn round upon this poor girl and talk of her father. The rich rogue, Mr. Lampton, thrives, the poor one, it is all of the poverty too, is hunted, hounded down, and starves or is transported.

Now, no more about fathers. What did the girl say to you?"

"She refused my offer."

"Well, you are pleased at that I rather suppose, as perhaps it was wrung out of you, not first intended."

"It was my errand to her."

"What can you want now then?"

"I would persist in it, and be anxious for its success. I have wronged her, and here is my repentance. I will marry her, if she will only consent."

"Do you know her?" asked the old lady. "Do you conceive what the heart of a true woman is when you talk thus? Why, sir, the insulted, roused virtue of the poorest wretch would be in arms against this. You have attempted to degrade and ruin her, bringing charges you knew to be false."

"Not then. I did not know that then."

"This is worse," said the old woman, "than all the rest. They were a part of your plot,

and what entreaty could not gain you expected from terror." He held down his head. "So you want my advice now and assistance, do you?"

"I came for that purpose."

"How do you wish me to employ them?" She fell back in her chair, half shutting her eyes as she spoke.

"To point out to her," he said, slowly, "that the proposal I made was honestly intended, and that I wish to act on it. I want your assistance in this. Advise her that she can obtain a respectable name and rank by accepting it."

"That's what you came for?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Then, Frederick Lampton, I can't know what you take me for. Do you think, sir, that I don't respect my own sex—that I would advise this young girl, so cruelly treated by you, to forget it all, and rush into your arms, because you hold up a little finger to beckon

her to you? I won't do it, sir. I'd rather see her starving in honest poverty than the wife of the man who could not respect her dependant position. Now go. Do not let me see you again. Do not let me hear this from you. She has refused you. I knew she would do that. I would have thrown her aside like a squeezed orange myself, if she hadn't done that. But the girl has sense and spirit. She couldn't endure you, sir. She couldn't."

He smoothed down his whiskers, and waved his handkerchief gently over his brow, striving to look very miserable. "I had thought, madam, that repentance might efface—"

"Pooh! pooh! You know you don't repent. You have an object—a view—I see it all." He coloured violently. He could not repress that, and the old lady again fell back in her chair, looking contemptuously at him. "I felt that all along, and from the first moment you spoke, I called up your conversation with Mr. Dawes."

"Mr. Dawes, madam, is my solicitor."

"Not then. Lately he is. Not then. But you learned nothing. You lost. I say that. So now this matter is ended."

"And I, when I thought I was right, have gained more ill will?"

"No. Not that," she said, with a curling lip. "You have gained contempt. That is all. You wrought for it, hard and fast, and get it. Good bye, good bye to you." She fell back in her chair again, while he quickly rose up, and just as the door gently opened, admitting Lucille.

"Good morning, madam."

"Ah! my dear," exclaimed the old woman, not heeding him, "how are you?" Neither noticed Mr. Lampton then, and he crept out, for he could keep up his assurance no longer, while Lucille went forward to Mrs. Lumsden. "You don't look very kindly on your suitor," continued Mrs. Lumsden, who had sensibly

become more gay, as Lucille entered. "You didn't notice him at all."

"Mr. Lampton, is it, madam?"

"Just he, my dear."

"And pray, madam, how did you know that?" said Lucille, rather amazed at the old lady's information.

"He was here on that errand this moment," she replied, "telling me of his proposition and your repulse. He wanted my advice and assistance, so I'm pledged and must—"

"Madam, dear madam, you wouldn't ask me, you couldn't think of that, surely. Reflect on what I suffered through this person, and do not put me in a position that would be most unpleasant to myself."

"Sit down, my dear, sit down. I won't press you here, be sure. I won't advise you to assent to Mr. Lampton's views, so you can keep your mind easy on that subject. Now tell me how you are getting on."

"I like much, madam, where I am. Lady

Myrtle is very kind to me, and the children quiet and affectionate. I could be happy, if others would permit me, and if I could restrain my own thoughts."

"Who or what annoys you?" asked the old lady, interested. That was evident in her face, and the twitching of her long, thin fingers, as they worked about each other.

"I have made strange discoveries, madam, since I saw you, and one object of this visit was to lay them before you. I want advice, and solicit it, madam, from you."

"You shall have it, if in my power. Go on and tell me what you want," and Lucille began her tale. The old lady had fallen away between the monsters, her eyes half closed, or suddenly opening up wide, as the interest moved her. Now and then a nod of the old head, with its cap and ribands, but not a word from her mouth. She listened on through the long account of Lucille's discoveries, her suspicions and interviews with her father. At

last all was told, and the old lady still remained silent, nor did Lucille disturb her.

"Alexandre Gaudelle:" she repeated the name once or twice, and then said, "Look about you, my dear, there is a French Ecclesiastical Registry some place about there. Find it, if you can."

Lucille looked into a bookcase near her, and at length did find an old registry. "This is the only one I see, madam."

"Give it to me then," and she turned over the leaves, brown and old-looking enough too they were. "I have no doubt that this is a baptismal certificate, given for some purpose connected with the infant to whom it refers, and that the name is that of the curé who performed the ceremony;" and then she went on looking out for the name. Suddenly she laid down the book, and shifted her glasses in many ways, and at last read out slowly,—"Vesoul. Department of the Seine. Alexandre Gaudelle, curé."

"The name is there, madam, is it?" asked Lucille, breathlessly.

"Yes, my dear, that name is here. Parish department and all. It is near Paris too, for something like it is running through my head as often heard before. I lived in Paris many years, but it is long ago, very long ago."

"Then, madam," said Lucille, composedly, now that the first agitation had worn off, "I shall go to Paris."

"You?"

"Yes, madam. I shall not live branded, if anything honest and human has a claim upon me. I shall examine for myself, and if all this prove a delusion, then in another land I shall seek a home. I could not live here, when the bolt is only suspended over my head ready to fall, to crush me."

The young girl's eyes sparkled brightly now under the impulse of this feeling, while Mrs. Lumsden looked up at her, at first doubtingly, and then in a moment approvingly.

"You shall, my dear, you shall go there," she said. "You shall have means to investigate for yourself, and if crushed and disappointed you come back, you have an asylum here, and let them talk at you as they like. You are not the first having high hopes and meeting only failure."

"I shall arrange some way with Lady Myrtle."

"Never mind her. I can settle all that. God will speed you, my dear. He bows the storm to the sufferer, and it is better too that all this doubt should be cleared up; and if the worst be true, we can meet it. If there be a hope, pursue it. Resignation and hope, my dear, resignation and hope. They are the grand medicine. They have been mine."

"Yours, madam. You have never required them."

"Ah! Ring that bell. I shall send word to Lady Myrtle, that you are to dine with me. Don't be excusing yourself."

"Far from that, madam. I shall be delighted at it."

The note was written and sent away. The dinner was over, and the old lady was sitting in her usual attitude, Lucille before her. She had talked of the past like one who was living much of it over again, with soul and memory stirred up from their deepest recesses. Much of it was curious and enigmatical in Lucille's hearing, but the old lady was talking more for herself then, than for her auditor. She was living over fifty years, and the scenes connected with them. You could see her eyes glisten and grow dull, as these old memories came over her. Suddenly she stopped that strain.

"You don't understand this, my dear. You don't, I know."

"I do not, madam," said Lucille.

"Ring the bell again." The servant came up. "I am engaged—even to Mr. Mortimer."

There was a bright hue on Lucille's cheek at the name, which caught Mrs. Lumsden's eye. "Come nearer, my dear, and listen to me."

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING ABOUT PREJUDICES.

The old lady lay back in her chair, her eyes half-closed, and one hand resting on the arm of the chair, the other holding her glasses. The cat was above, purring as usual, and clewing up her great, soft paws into balls, which she rolled out and in as she pleased, while Vesta, whose life seemed a perpetual doze, was lying at Lucille's feet, to whom she evidently had a fancy. Lucille sat up, look-

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ing towards Mrs. Lumsden and waiting for a sign. It came at length.

"I said, listen, my dear, didn't I?" She began thus: "I'll tell you a history—the history of a prejudice. You can remember I once warned you against a prejudice. Here then is one. It wrecked and ruined. That was natural. Most prejudices do that. Fifty years ago there was a very beautiful girl in Suffolk. She was beautiful! You wouldn't know that if you saw her now, for she had trials and they changed her. She had a father and mother, whose love for her knew no bounds, but had a failing. It was a prejudice. They were of old family and high name, and the pride of this was their prejudice. It ruined that young girl. She had two brothers. They were amiable, accomplished young men, but this prejudice was in them too. They had both entered a cavalry regiment, and in it—at a time such admissions were rare enough—was the son of an army contractor.

He was a plebeian, but I suppose had all the true instincts of his origin, for while the aristocratic corps always tabooed him, he simply contented himself with prophecying the coming doom of their order, and he did this so mildly, that they began to think they might carry the insult of abuse still farther. The eldest of the two brothers, on one occasion, heated with wine, said more than he should. He could not keep even within the licensed bounds of previous displays, and how could he? It was the daily lesson of his youth, that pride of birth, drilled into him as the virtue that hid and glossed over every vice, so it was entwined with his being, and as the cornet had no huge shield with its dozens of absurd quarterings, he was fair game. The words ran high, and that eldest brother threw a glass of wine in the cornet's face. I have heard this story from an eye-witness, and can vouch for its truth. The plebeian had blood and spirit within him. He was calm and collected

too on this occasion, for he rose, very cool, while they were all excited, and went over to the door. There was a loud laugh, and he went out of the mess-room, so they all sat down and continued drinking their wine, thinking for a minute no more about it, until the cornet walked in again, closed the door after him, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. They looked up at him. He had a brass-bound box in one hand, and two naked swords in the other. You may think, my dear, that this appearance rather startled them, and so it did. He came over to the table, and laying down the box, whose contents they all knew, he placed the two swords on the top of it. He was very pale-looking, but quite cool, and he had taken his place next to that elder brother. There was an empty glass beside him. He filled it up with water and flung it calmly into his face."

"'The plebeians,' he said, 'have not robbed

enough to be able to commence their quarrels with wine.'

"The eldest brother sprang to his feet, all eyes on him. He was dizzy and giddy for a moment, and ordered the plebeian, like a hound, to his kennel.

"Captain,' said the cornet, and the man's cold, icy manner, threw a chill over them all. 'We are equal here. To-morrow I shall horsewhip you in the barrack-yard. To-night, either of these is at your service:' he pointed then to the naked swords and the brass-bound case.

"'Choose for yourself, sir,' answered the captain, for he saw now the full consequences of his conduct, and he had a noble nature too, but it wanted training. No man doubted his courage—and in other hands he would have risen at once and made a frank apology to the man whom he had so bitterly insulted. It was then too late. Before the whole mess what had occurred could not be pardoned, so

the Devil, my dear, just took up his quarters in that room, and saw it all out, quite after his own heart.

"'I will not, captain,' said the cornet.

"The captain snatched up the naked sword. 'This will do.'

"They cleared away the tables, and amongst the party of young men, hot with wine and excitement, there was not a warning voice. Those things were common enough in barrack-rooms then too. So they fought, fought, my dear, and the cornet ran his sword through that eldest brother, dyeing its blade with his life's blood. Some were terrified, others only more terribly excited, roused by this horrible offering to an offended prejudice. The younger brother tore away the sword from the hand of the dead man—for dead he was—while the cornet took the key of the door and laid it on the table.

"'I appeal to you all, gentlemen, for a verdict on my conduct. One death is enough:'

and cold as he was during the danger, he was greatly moved then.

"'You are a coward, sir,' cried the younger brother.

"'God knows. Perhaps it were better that I was.' But they raised a howl at him. They goaded him, pushing that young brother into the danger, and there was no wise head there to counsel or controul: but the cornet was still immovable.

"'You have murdered my brother,' said the young man.

"'I might—' The cornet did not finish that sentence; but all noticed a peculiar, hard line, forming about his mouth. Even very cold men can be goaded up to anything. 'Come, sir, you shall have no excuse.'

"'Pistols—let it be pistols,' cried some one. The cornet bowed, and the brass-bound box was opened. The pistols in it were taken out, examined, and loaded. I don't know anything my dear, about duelling, how they place the

men, or any of the requisites. So I can't describe this to you. But both were at last put in position. They fired, and the cornet shot that young brother through the heart, through the heart—" She said this very emphatically and slowly, slightly rocking her body for a moment or so, and then falling again into her previous position. Some minutes more she remained silent. Lucille half shuddered. She thought the history was the life of its narrator. She began again, or rather resumed her narrative.

" That was the second offering to a prejudice. Two murders, my dear, just two, and a brave man's life perilled. They were all quiet enough, you may be sure, after that scene. The cornet had sunk down in a corner in the room, and the others stood aghast over the two dead bodies. They had lifted and placed them on chairs, and sober they all were, sober and terrified, so they just sat there or stood without a word. Suddenly the cornet rose and walked

over to them. They shrank away, young and middle-aged, until he stood face to face with the dead. He was then cold, immovable, stern rather than anything else. Long he looked on the dead faces, then turned, with ferocity in his eyes upon the men near him.

"'You, you did this. That blood was shed by you. You are all noble, from dukes down, you represent all the pride of your class. Be still, every one of you. Blood enough has been shed, and you did it. You thought a man who had nothing aristocratic about him would bear you for ever, and you see the end now, for a peasant can draw a trigger or lift a sword with any of you. The hour too will come, when you shall feel this. You great or noble, you are but slaves, the poor worms crawling about a gilded custom, who will be hunted from your assumptions by the brawny arms and strong minds of the race you now feign to despise. You have murdered these two men. They are your victims.'

"He walked away from them then, not a tongue or a finger raised against him, and left the barrack that night. This is not all. That man was wealthy. He loved and was beloved by a noble-minded girl of that privileged class thus fiercely attacked, and the hope of a union with her was completely destroyed. They compelled her to marry another, and that broke the last link that bound him to this country. That woman lived to be a mother, and soon after died. They say she died of grief, but her noble friends would flout that, yet she died, my dear, died of a broken heart. I know it. Let me finish this portion now. That man turned away from England. It was then that Napoleon was knocking down Kings and making Patricians tremble. He was in the hey-day of his power and fame, and that cornet entered his service. The time came when his arms were turned against his own country, and fighting against her, he fell. He had risen to high rank, but was a soli-

tary, unhappy man. Now, my dear, all that drama terminated. Four lives sacrificed to a prejudice. That was it, to a prejudice."

She paused, not exhausted, but reflecting. She was not tired looking, nor did she appear moved, though the story was harrowing enough, but she leaned back in her chair, as if to arrange her materials. She went on again almost immediately.

"I shall now return to the young girl's fate. The terrible news that came to father and mother nearly killed both. They did not show it, but said that they would have regretted if either of their sons had behaved otherwise. That was a lesson, but it was lost on their daughter. She looked at things in a very different light. She began to have a very thorough contempt for her parents' strongest feeling. She saw its folly and the terrible results from it, and instead of being deterred by what she heard and saw, she just fell in love with the curate, to make matters a

thousand times worse. And worse they became. Father and mother could never forgive her that feeling. Their dead sons always rose before them protesting against it, and while their daughter only looked for happiness, they wanted position and connexion. She struggled hard against them, but they were too strong for her. The curate was sent away. Insidiously it was represented to him that she had only amused her high-born fancies by winning his humble love, and while he could neither see nor communicate with her, these reports came to his ears until he believed them. Yet that man rose high. He might have died a bishop, but he would not aspire to a mitre, and he married an humble girl, leaving one son the heir of his moderate fortune, and I believe the possessor of his honesty and virtues.

"The young girl pined. She had loved with all the fervor of a first attachment. She had looked upon that attachment as the re-

ality of her life, which could only terminate with it, winding round her sympathies, her hopes, and her day-dreams. But it was all snapped, my dear, broken, scattered. Hope was crushed. At last she heard of the marriage. She might until that moment have indulged in anticipations, but this closed the scene. She hoped no more. Now, you see, my dear, how beautifully this prejudice wrought. It made a tomb for four bodies, a grave for one prospect of happiness.

"This is not all though. You know, my dear, that pride don't live on nothing, no more than humility, so that pride and family name had to be supported, but misfortunes and mistakes lessened the means. At the critical time, an Indian nabob returned to the neighbourhood, after twenty years' absence, and in the possession of a great fortune. He had purchased the seat of his ancestors, and, if an old name would do him any good, he had it. Unmarried too, he sought a wife, and this

poor girl pleased him. She could plead nothing against this proposition, which had her parents' consent, and she was again sacrificed—but this time, with a show of reason—for it was to their wants. She went bravely to the altar, and I have heard it said—I believe it too—made an upright and prudent wife. Her husband at least thought so, for she closed his eyes on his death-bed, and he left her the undisputed possessor of all his vast wealth. Long before this her parents had died, and there she stood in the world, a victim and a sacrifice. All, all were gone. Her brothers, father, husband, all— and no children blessed her union. She was alone, an old withered trunk: alone because hard and absurd prejudices had ruined her hopes in life. Of all the parties to this history but one survives now: but one lives to claim kindred with any of them. Hugh Mortimer is the curate's son, and—and—" She stopped short. Perhaps she was moved, but she showed it

little for a moment or so, until at last she could hold out no longer. "That young girl was—"

"You, yourself, madam," said Lucille, in a low voice, bending forward. "It was you."

"It was, my dear. It was. This old, weird woman, Margaret Lumsden, and that young girl, are the same."

"And you, madam, have known great and undeserved suffering. Death and ruined hopes have brought their miseries to you; yet, madam, God gave you firmness and wisdom to go through this ordeal. He has blessed you with the heart to feel; and, tried yourself, you can pity the tried."

"I am resigned," she said, firmly.

"Resignation and hope, madam, I think, make up your own doctrines. I have heard you frequently say so, and I see them every day exemplified in you. How bitterly tried too!" The young girl spoke earnestly.

"Well, my dear, that is all past now, and the future—"

"To you hopeful—"

"Gloomy, my dear, very gloomy," said the old lady, in a painful, sorrowful tone.

"No, madam. It is grand: mysterious it may be—for no man knoweth what that last rest shall be—but if sorrow purifies, and suffering prepares, if duties correctly performed give consolation, and yield an expectation, then for you the future has no terrors."

"The eyes of age, my dear, should be closed by the hand of affection, and the hour is coming:" a light dew was covering the old face. "I am alone and isolated. There can be no tears over my death-bed—"

"Madam, madam, if others live after you, there shall be tears."

"Would you weep for the old woman?" She asked this suddenly, dryly too, almost in a repulsive tone, but the young girl did not heed that. She simply bent forward, took one

of the withered hands, and raised it to her lips. There was a sob stifled suddenly, but when she dropped the hand gently down, it was moist with tears. Lucille rose at once, and turned her head away for a time, but when she looked back again at Mrs. Lumsden, her face was bright and cheerful. There was not a trace of gloom on it, but a soft radiance shone over it.

"Madam, I shall go home now," she said, in a low tone.

"Very well, my dear. Good night."

"Good night, madam," and she shook hands with the old lady gaily and cheerfully, and bid her good night in a happy voice. And she was happy, believing that her feeling for Mrs. Lumsden had somewhat lightened the heavy load upon her mind.

When she was gone, the old lady sat a long time thinking. She gave no voice to her thoughts, but rang the bell for her servant.

"Go to Mr. Dawes early in the morning, and say he would oblige me by calling, if possible, at ten o'clock."

Immediately after this she was wheeled into her bed-room.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER DECLARATION.

The next day, Lucille, strong in her determination to go to France, began to make her preparations. She obtained a French Ecclesiastical Directory for that year, and the name still in it. This gave more hope. It gave also a point from which to start, for whatever other memorandum might have been made of this event, if M. Gaudelle still lived, she would get on the way to discover the truth. Something whispered hope and roused courage

within her, impressing the conviction that she should try, and promising reward. It was a great venture, too, for a very young girl like her; but she believed in the existence of the unseen virtue around her, whose existence she had proved in more than one instance, and she anticipated that it would assist her. So determined, she soon was prepared to go.

Another consultation with Mrs. Lumsden followed, and the old lady had exerted herself to smooth the way. She had her passport ready, some letters that might be useful, and had induced Lady Myrtle to believe that it was upon her business that Lucille was going to France. Her Ladyship kindly consented to every arrangement, and so Lucille set off on her mission.

While Lucille goes by steamboat and railroad towards France, and through it towards that fair capital so full of gaiety and pleasure and that careless *abandon* which makes life a glittering stream and humanity a light bubble

floating down its surface, checked now and then by the eddies in the current, but ever rising bright and shining to the top, others are filled with cares and anxieties that gnaw and corrode in and round them. Some new lights were breaking upon Lord Shapland, some stern doubts preying upon Florence.

There were very few people in town now. The winter was coming, and, with that strange perversity of taste, the country was crowded by a certain class who had, with the dropping leaves of the failing autumn, poured out of the town. This was fashion, a peculiar instinct that ruled five hundred people in one position and was imitated by five thousand fools in a subordinate one. It had only caprice for its rule of life, and that caprice just varied, and was very slavishly imitated in most of its variations. Necessity, business, and other pursuits kept many of those who would have followed in the train of this fashion still in town. Lord Shapland remained. Thirty

thousand a year can laugh at fashion. Lord Toddington remained. The simulated blood of age would be thick and chill in the country and the old peer had still a small set in town whom his dinners would seduce from the thraldom of the rival fascination. There were old clubmen and young adventurers who still thronged round the aged Adonis; and as long as art could simulate the appearance of that lusty nature which was long, long gone, he never seemed to dread the winter frosts that were thickening round him, and measuring both tomb and coffin, ordering hearse, plumes, and mutes, hinting at last—but the old peer never thought of the last—the fitful present, that was his, for the past was a blank in that old brain, the future, no pleasant contemplation, and never indulged in.

In the window of their club both the old and the young lord were now sitting. It looked out on the street, dreary enough that street too, for the life that used to stream through it

was away grouse shooting, or hunting, or shivering in dull country nooks, not catching spirit for coming labour, but keeping up the Idol's temple with vain worship at its shrine, or perhaps wasting the jaded remains of its faded life somewhere on the continent, at German baths or Italian cities,—flying duns, and deep in hazard. There was no traffic in the street. Its aristocratic pavement would have risen in terrible rebellion against that. Outside, Lord Shapland's groom led about his horses, and within, he was standing, meditative, and rather melancholy, beside the old peer, for he had risen, as if about to go. He thought Lord Toddington was less cordial with him than usual, and he could not divine the reason. He never imagined that there was deep rivalry in that old heart beside him, and if he had, he could have said there was no cause, for up till that moment, he felt that Florence was impressionless. He made no way with her. She received him rather coldly of late,

always keeping down rising declarations, and often, in his presence, not seeming to know whether he was there or not. He was galled and humbled too. The early impressions of an over-confident youth were being rapidly dissipated; for here, were he thought to come was to conquer, he found a barrier he could not overthrow.

"Are you going away?" Lord Toddington asked, when he saw him rising.

"I think so," was the abstracted reply.

"Everything's deucedly dull now," said the other, rubbing the old hands together, as if he would force the blood under the straw-coloured kids into more active circulation—"dull and stupid, too." A pause then. "This fellow's a fool."

The young lord smiled over this after-conviction. Perhaps he even thought he was right, and that there was a deep truth in the second voice. "Yes, we're all dull," he remarked, "and one doesn't well know what

to do with one's self. "I'll go into the country for a few miles."

"The country—Pah! it's very cold out there—must be." He looked into Shapland's face. "That's a sham now. He don't intend a bit of it."

"It would do one good to ride out."

"Pooh! You'd be frozen. I feel chilly as it is. No, come and dine with me. I'll be alone, quite an impromptu, but I'll do well for you." He dropped away back in his chair now, and the second voice came out very slowly. "He's away after that gipsy. That's it."

"I would, willingly, but I'm engaged to that Hewitson set for this evening. I rather think I owe them something, so I couldn't break with them."

"A very fast lot," said the old lord, with a slight shiver. "They'll ruin you. All blacklegs and gamblers, every man of them. You have cards there." A little sympathy rose to

the surface now. "Poor devil. I shouldn't like him to be cleaned out." Thus, the second voice spoke more amiably than usual.

The young lord half smiled. He did not think that his old companion cared much whether he was ruined or not, and he was rather thankful that he wronged him by this supposition. "I don't play much," he said, "and never very deeply. I lose sometimes, and often win."

"Quit it, while you're safe. Don't tempt them to set about fleecing you, or they're sure to do it. What about the Mapleton's now?" The second voice gave forth a revelation. "Does he think I asked the gipsy?"

Shapland started, then cooled, and looked on the old face before him, wigged and dyed as it was, age struggling out, though its appearance was always suppressed and denied. He, however, determined to take full advantage of the after thoughts.

"I saw Miss Mapleton yesterday. There's

something wrong there, for she don't seem so happy as when she first came to town. An attachment, I fancy."

"Not a bit of it—not a bit. She hasn't heart enough for that, nor sentiment, nor appreciation. A very beautiful new house she is, but the rooms are not furnished." There was the usual pause, and Shapland was attentive. At last the second voice came. "She never would have refused me, had she any taste."

It was out now; but the declaration did not amuse the young lord. He saw only the conceit of a poor old age in it, which did not please him, so he pressed the conversation no more, but turned to go. "I suppose we shall meet to-morrow?"

"You won't go out of town then?"

"I can't say. To-morrow will tell." He then left, and the old lord stood at the window until he mounted his horse.

"There he goes now, not a bad fellow

either, but conceited. He'll ask that girl to marry him. Will she, I wonder? To be sure. He's younger than I am, and she'll take him. Though perhaps not. One can't say much certain about those women." This was all out-spoken thought, but not heard, for there was no one near him. Slowly then he got up and walked, or rather hobbled, through the room. At last his carriage came, and he got away.

Shapland went at a slow walk through the streets. He could barely credit himself as to the course he was pursuing. This girl attracted him, seriously too, and he hardly was able to study his own heart or feelings. He had judgment when he would exercise it. He had only passion now. The horses were pulled up at Mr. Mapleton's door. Florence was at home, and Shapland saw her sitting opposite to Mortimer. There was more animation in her face then than he had for a

long time remarked. With Mortimer he was off-handed, with her rather reserved.

"I have not seen you, Mortimer, this long time past, and thought you had left town."

"So I would, but I never can get time to do that, no matter what my inclinations may be. I am of the toiling many."

"And I—by my honor, I believe it too—of the idle class."

"Non-producers they call you," laughed Mortimer. "But it is your fate, for perhaps if thrown amongst the workmen by birth, you might have been as laborious a toiler as any of them. Your position gives no necessity for labour."

"But labour," Florence remarked, "is a birthright. If we do not work with the hand, we might with the head. And philanthropy can also find many ways to vent its spare hours and use its surplus means."

"All that makes a theory, Miss Mapleton," said Shapland, "difficult to be honestly

carried out in practice, and it is not every one can do it. I acknowledge its truth, and repent my want of exertion."

"Repentance won't do, by itself."

"Then direct me how to labour."

Mortimer looked earnestly at the young lord now. He had never thought much about him, had never believed he differed in anything from that large class to which his rank attached him, but somehow he fancied that there was earnestness in his words, and that, properly directed, he might yet grow into good.

"I shall tell you a tale, in humble life, true it is. I can vouch that, and then I shall show you a channel in which to labour."

"Let us have the tale, Mr. Mortimer," said Florence, looking into his face, while the young lord assented.

"It is this then—the event's not a month old yet," and then, pathetically too, he told all

Lucille's sufferings, and the pieman's honest charity.

"I want the heroine's name," said Shapland.

"Lucille."

"Ah! I know," said Florence, coldly.

"I shall remember the pieman," said Shapland, earnestly.

"Well, then I won't weaken the effects of my tale by waiting to discuss its incidents. Miss Mapleton is interested in the heroine, and you in the hero, so you must see I have done good by the narrative. Good-bye now. I came to execute a commission, and have almost forgotten it. I shall see Mr. Mapleton to-morrow?"

"He will be in town to-morrow," said Florence. "But, I fear, Mr. Mortimer, your tale has not the intended effect with me. I have no association, and intend to have none, in future, with that young girl."

Mortimer turned full towards her. He did not reply, but simply bowed and withdrew.

He thought the beautiful form before him almost repulsive then, impressed as he was with the idea that the story of suffering he had related would have drawn out every feeling of a true woman's heart. Florence did not recover at once. She saw Mortimer was angry, and there was little relief for her in the young lord's presence, but he came nearer her, and seemed some way oppressed.

"I have always liked Mortimer," he said, "and liked him just exactly because I find him in everything the reverse of myself. An earnest, straightforward mind, that has chosen its place and determines to work out its lot. That is his."

"Your lordship sometimes indulges in predilections which I cannot share. Mr. Mortimer is a man of the world. I can't say more for him," said Florence.

"No. I remember now. You once declared rather a dislike for him."

"I—" but she checked herself at once. "I

have no decided feeling, my lord, in this case. Perhaps I may learn to appreciate those good qualities that so visibly impress you, but now—"

"Very well. I would be sorry to distress you with persisting in an unpleasant subject, and indeed I do not well know how it came before us. I must quit it now." He remained for some time silent, while Florence, with downcast eyes, seemed to study the flowers in the carpet. He looked into her face, but met no response in it, and he was growing agitated a little, quailing before her, though there was a confirmed purpose in his mind. "I have come here, Miss Mapleton," he continued, "for perhaps the last time—" She did not even look up then—"the last time, though your words may change that probability. I do not know how I may have succeeded in my very unskilled efforts to gain your esteem—"

"Mine, my lord, mine?" She said this hurriedly.

"Yours, Miss Mapleton. I must go farther now, and say your love and regard." Florence looked confused. "I don't know how this declaration may be accepted, but I cannot restrain its avowal." His voice sank almost to a whisper. There was heart in its tones now.

"May I, Miss Mapleton, may I hope?"

A long pause. Florence had pride, desire for the splendid position to which such an alliance would elevate her. In that pause much passed through her young mind. It was all rejected. "I am afraid, my lord," she was beginning—

"Then," said Shapland, interrupting her, "this is rejected?"

"Kindly, my lord, and with every regard for you, but I—"

"Do not say more," he observed, calmly. "I have misunderstood my own merits, and your position. I have trespassed, presumed—"

"No," said Florence, "you have not. You have honoured me. I feel that, and shall pre-

serve this declaration as an offering which gratifies, though it pains me. For my own sake, for my own, I should have wished it otherwise."

He now rose. Every word she spoke was kindly said, with low voice and trembling eye. He could not tell whether it was affected or not, but the marks of sympathy were in it, and the manner soothed him, preventing him then from feeling all at once the wound which his pride must experience from a rejection not anticipated. He held out his hand frankly to her, and cordially she placed her own within it.

"I can only terminate this scene," he said, "by wishing you the full and perfect enjoyment of that happiness which I had vainly anticipated I might have contributed to create, and pray that it may be as complete as I should have struggled to make it." He raised her hand to his lips and went away. It fell into her lap and lay motionless. In a minute after she could hear the hard tread of a spurred

horse, as he galloped from the door, and she fell into a long, sad reverie.

She had refused this offer. Hundreds, wealthier, nobly born, as beautiful as she was, would have grasped it without a doubt—would have sedulously striven to catch a regard she had thrown away: and for what? The young girl's head fell upon her breast as she asked herself this question. She loved, without hope, her heart told her, against the claims of a rival whom that moment she hated, a man too, who hardly paid polite attention to her. But this was poor, weak, erring human nature, weaving the net round itself, and struggling more and more to tarnish the prospect of happiness within its range, fighting for what it could not obtain, throwing away the possession within its grasp, and, never satisfied, rebelling where it should not. Florence was the type of all this then.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CURÉ.

Steamboat and railroad had plied their way and bridged England over into France. It was not a season for much travel, yet many travelled over from the white cliffs to the Gallic boundary. The time for the tourists to return was not yet come, so business was the great inducement now, though disappointed expectations sought too a change, hoping thus to throw off the chill and fill the wants of aching hearts by seeing new scenes and strange faces.

A close carriage in the early morning passed rapidly through the streets of London, down into the city and over the bridge to the railway station that went down to the coast, and there it stopped. A young man, well muffled, got out of it. He had a valet with him, who set about seeing his luggage packed, and got tickets for both, so in a few minutes more the bell rang, the iron horse snorts and fumes, and they are away. Lord Shapland is gone to Paris.

At the same hour the young lord leaves London, a man is strolling along the boulevards in Paris. There is nothing very new to him there. He has seen the trees and the cafés, the shops with their nackeries and bijouterie, a thousand times before, the sparkling gaiety even then floating along that magnificent curved line that girds up the brilliancy of the capital within itself, does not affect him. He does not feel this. He does not care for it. But he snuffs up the gentle breeze that is

playing amongst the slightly-bronzed leaves, that turn their color at winter's first kiss, before they fall lifeless into its arms. He walks boldly and erect, and is well dressed too, not overdressed, just well and genteelly dressed, moustach'd and bearded, with a certain foreign air about him, that sits well. He wears too, on one finger—of a rather brown and not overdelicate hand—a peculiar diamond ring. The stone seems of great value, and the setting is remarkable—old, some heirloom. He stops before a jeweller's, looks at the ring, and then says to himself,—

"I shan't do it now, for there an't no chance of seein him here, nor any body on his account," and so he strolled on. He did not see the shadow over him then. He did not hear the rustling train, nor see the steamboat cutting through the waves, or he would have changed that intention. The danger near was not known, nor suspected, and so he went on, thinking no more about it, conjec-

turing now only where he should breakfast. Soon a café attracted him, and in it he deposited himself, furbishing up this ring too when he was in it.

Later than this the old curé of the parish of Vesoul, was sitting at his modest breakfast-table. He was a very old man, thin, spare, with hair like snow, though his general appearance exhibited the possession of health and peace of mind. His complexion was almost ruddy, a clear color under the white skin, which shone out healthy in contrast with his white hair. His soutaine and white bands, were scrupulously neat and clean, and everything about him, plain and simple as they all were, showed taste and refinement. A small library of rare and valuable books was arranged in the corner of the room, near the China-store, and there were some paintings and engravings, upon religious and historical subjects, not masterpieces, but perhaps offerings from college friends or early com-

panions, before their genius could give them world-fame, and their experience make their productions equal to their character. They were labelled, with a name and date, in the old curé's own hand, and some of them went back thus to a distant time. His window was open, and the stove just heated, not more, while a pure clear air came into the room, and the old man took his coffee and his bread slowly, reading as he breakfasted. The open window looked upon a little winding path that led down to the road, and beyond a belt of poplars to the left, was the tower of a church, while before, and far away in the distance, were green fields and shaven stubble, for the harvest was then garnered, as the winter was coming in, but not fast. It was still pleasant, genial weather. A little cloud of dust attracted the old curé's attention. He raised his eyes towards the road, as a chaise stopped at his wicket, and when the steps of the carriage were let down, a young female got

out of it, lifted the latch of the wicket, and came up to his house.

"Who can this be?" he asked himself. The face he could not see, for it was concealed behind the thick veil which she wore. "I don't know the figure either." The foot, by this time, was on the little gravel border before his door, and the bell was very gently rung.

"Was M. le Curé at home?" This was the visitor's inquiry, and she was at once shewn into his parlour. It was Lucille, who had safely come thus far upon her peculiar mission.

"I am perfectly unknown to you, my father," she said, at once, after he had placed a chair for her, and seated himself, "and my business is one of a very peculiar nature." He simply bowed his head. "I am French, I believe, by birth, English by a long residence in that country, a Catholic in religion, and am come to you, my father, for the solution of a secret, which I know is in your possession."

"You astonish me, daughter," he replied, "but pray proceed."

"On the eleventh of September," continued Lucille, getting into her subject at once, "in the year 18—, and at night, you baptized a young child, a girl—"

"Ah! my child. Nearly twenty years ago. This old memory requires something more particular than that to refresh it."

"You have a registry, father, of such events?"

"Not when done out of my parish; and sometimes events outside of it do occur, which are not noted as belonging to it."

"Then if done within it, father?" She was very pale, for all her hopes now depended upon this one point.

"That," he said, pointing to a large clasped folio, in a stand under his bookcase, "contains the registry of births and marriages for the last twenty years, in this parish."

She brightened a little now. "Might I, then, father, trouble you?"

"Certainly," said the old Curé, with alacrity, and he soon brought forward the thick, massive volume, and opening, placed it on the table. "You said in the year 18—?"

"And on the eleventh of September," Lucille added.

"The eleventh of September 18—" He began his investigation through it, and at last came to the year, then page after page, and he was at the month. "The eleventh of September?" he asked.

"Yes, my father," said Lucille.

"There is a note of a baptism here on that date. A female child, baptized Lucille."

"That, that is the name," exclaimed Lucille, starting forward from her seat. "Oh! my father. What more?"

The old man rapidly closed the book. "Come hither, my daughter," and he motioned Lucille nearer him. "You have a small chain

about your neck with a heart attached to it, and there is a mark between your shoulders."

"Yes, yes, my father. All these signs are correct. There are the heart and chain. The mark is quite discernible."

"Then, my daughter," said the old Curé, very slowly, "this investigation ceases here. "In that silken heart you will find the transcript of this register. There is a note in the book not contained in the transcript. But, daughter, seek no more."

"My father, I would know all."

The old man fell into a reverie. He looked at the young girl before him for a long time, in an earnest manner, and then at the massive book. He seemed to be, from some cause, strangely moved. At last he took the young girl's hand. "Tell me, daughter," he said, "have you any idea of the nature of the revelation you seek?"

"None, my father, none."

"Do not persist in it then. Drop it. Your

position looks like independence. Struggle then in the world, and earn to live. Seek no more what that book contains."

"I have come," she said, "to solve the mystery of this paper. To know my origin. I care not how humble it may be, so that it is free from crime. Father, you can tell this."

"Crime, crime!" said the Curé. "Daughter, ask no more."

She had her face in her hands and wept. "God is just," she at last replied. "I would know all."

"Then, daughter," said the old man, "there are revelations there I would not make to you on my own authority. You are that Lucille, whose name is recorded in that book. I know this, but other parties must be consulted before I would make known to you its full contents. I shall be in Paris to-morrow, and wait upon you. In the mean time I can consult those who I believe are interested in this matter, and with their consent I shall

make known to you, all you ask."

Lucille was troubled now. Hope had vanished, and the destiny that awaited her in one position seemed to follow her in all. That father who had claimed her in England, if not the real parent, might be less criminal than the one she sought. "I would know one circumstance," she said, visibly affected. "It will not include names. Are the parents mentioned in that book living or dead?"

"The mother is many years dead. I believe the father is also dead. For years he has been absent from France, or not known as residing in it."

"I owe thanks to God for that," she said. "He was a Frenchman?"

"He was."

This was some relief. It completely overthrew whatever claims the man calling himself her father could now have to her, and gave her time to conjecture as to the position of her real parent. But she had determined

to ask no more then, so she rose, and gave the name of her hotel to the Curé. He saw her into her chaise, and promised if possible to be in Paris the next day. If not, he would write to her on the following one, but he should that evening communicate with the proper parties in Paris.

"I am not at liberty to ask their names, father?"

"Not now. You may know them soon enough, but not now, my daughter. You are persisting in a course that can only bring sorrow. As for me I shall perform my duty. May God guard you."

They did not talk more then. He saw her into her chaise, and stood at his little wicket, until it had driven off. Then he returned to the parlour, looked long, long at the great folio, and at last opened it, found the page where the entry was made, and read that entry aloud,—

"A female child, named Lucille, and born

on the evening of the elventh of September, 18—, is the daughter of M. the Marquis de Layne. A small steel chain tightly riveted about her neck has in the shape of a heart formed of silk pendant to it, a record of the date of her birth. She has also been marked between the shoulders, with an indelible black fluid in the form of a cross, to assist in her identification, if ever necessary. The witnesses present were Lucille Williams, the nurse, and Lisette Langy, who accompanied her from the Chateau of M. de Layne. Signed, Alexandre Gaudelle, and dated this 11th day of September, 18—."

The old man read it again, then closed the book. He seemed to struggle long with his feelings, not well knowing how to act. The manners of the young girl made a favourable impression upon him. He liked her earnestness in her mission, and was he to tell her the meaning of the entry in that book? He knew the terms on which the Marquis had

settled his property, and that he was long away—dead—gone. Should he direct her, and let her hazard law process? Perhaps that might call forth the Marquis, if alive. There were two witnesses to that entry. Their names were under it. Where were they? The old man bowed his head and prayed.

"May God direct me. She shall know it all." That was his conclusion and resolve.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GAMBLER AND THE CURE.

Twenty years have almost elapsed since M. Duravel was suddenly raised out of his bed to attend the Marchioness de Layne. A long space in human existence this, and productive of no common changes in the country where the first events in this narrative occurred. M. Duravel, the doctor, had been some years dead, and M. le Neve, the relative to whom the Marquis de Layne had entrusted his property, was also dead, leaving a son, who in-

herited his wealth and what had first belonged to the Marquis. There was not a character that had been present at the Marquis's chateau on the night of its destruction then known to be alive. The memory of M. de Layne himself, was completely obliterated in the recollection of those who had been his intimates in Paris, though the arrangements connected with the disposal of his charitable contributions were accurately adhered to and carried out. An unknown hand managed that. Not a word about the Marquis had transpired since the termination of the first term of five years, and M. le Neve was too much interested in his continued disappearance to make enquiries about him.

France itself had suffered convulsions. Another dynasty raised up in the first flush of a popular excitement had fallen, and the crown had yielded to the republic. Perhaps the unsettled state of affairs there for some time had also tended to complicate the events connected

with the Marquis, though they did not interfere with the continued disposal of his property in accordance with his stipulations. These were hard upon M. le Neve, junior. His father was dead, and if he too had been sure of M. de Layne's death, he would have disregarded stipulations, and treated the property as his own; but there was an agency somewhere which controlled him, though he could not discover its nature or locality.

It was night now. A hot glowing atmosphere, in a warm chamber, with windows closed, and curtains drawn down, where a dozen of men are sitting together round a table, the gas from two huge globes above streaming upon them, and noiseless servants coming and going, not attending to what those men do, but pouring out wine, or bringing brandy as inclination prompts a demand upon them. There were wild, haggard faces in that party, pale brows and glazed eyes, hair streaming loose and uncared, and passions painting themselves upon

the human clay, wrinkling, contorting, and deforming it. It was an old scene without a new incident. There were in the group some of those cold, collected wills, that seem iron in excitement, and never move under that impetus that rouses others to madness, and then they were the excitable natures, that curse, and foam, and grow maddened, losing memory and discretion. All these were here in that group of a dozen.

Amongst them was one young man more remarkable than any other. His face was singularly regular and classic. The features moulded with a care that almost left no room for criticism, and the hair long, black, and curling, sweeping round them like a frame of jet. You could tell the occupation of this party from its appearance, even if you did not see the gold and notes piled on the table, and pencils and books entering debts or credits. It was in every face, so pre-occupied and expressive, burning with disappointment or

flushed with triumph: but on this face, so singularly beautiful, there was an expression hard to define. Hope had gone—a dark shade coloured it, a vile passion distorted it, rendering the features hideous in their very beauty, tightening, furrowing them, leaving deep traces and harsh lines, where nature had contrived a surface pure and even as polished marble. He was standing up, with a caster in his hand, the dice lying on the table, and the whole party was deep in hazard. The hand trembled. Heavy, constant losses, had weakened the nerves—for he was not one of the cool set—and he seemed to afford a contrast which was relished by an old moustachoed veteran opposite to him—a winner too. This young handsome man—now half a fiend, and nearly ruined—was M. le Neve.

"Monsieur has the throw," said the veteran.

M. le Neve did not for a moment speak. He swallowed down, as it were, some rising words. None there but himself knew the value

of this throw. It would completely ruin or save him, so he lifted the dice slowly—you would almost say cautiously—and dropped them into the caster.

"Nine is the main," exclaimed another of the party.

"And four, my chance," said M. le Neve.

"Four, Monsieur," yawned the veteran, but even that did not move him. He saw anxiety in every face, and he fancied sneers on some, yet he did not go faster for that. A terrible thought controlled him. He was convinced, he would throw the main. A slow rattle in the caster, his hand nervous, his brain hot, but the dice came out at last, and rolled over the smooth table, then stopped.

"What is it?" asked some one.

"Nine. The main," said the veteran, quite coolly, "and M. le Neve pays."

"The main. The main."

"That's it, Monsieur," said the veteran again, giving a twirl to his grey moustache.

"Very pleasant, gentlemen, very pleasant indeed. I shall settle these debts and then blow out my brains." He said this coolly, obstinately. "I think I am ruined."

"Pooh, pooh?" exclaimed the veteran. "You'll get over this and grow better used to the affair. Monsieur must not be discouraged by a little accident like this."

"But Monsieur is ruined," said the young man, hotly.

"Disagreeable that. Monsieur le Neve, twenty-three thousand francs. I have it entered here."

"M. le Neve moved away from the table. There was some dignity in his manner, for though the fiend was tugging at him, and he might have been more excited by the coolness and apathy about him, he repressed it. "I shall settle those debts at my hotel before nine to-morrow evening."

"Monsieur had better play on then," said the other.

"Good morning gentlemen. Fate is against me. At another time." He passed over to the window, and lifted the curtain. "Broad day, gentlemen," and so it was. He called for his hat and cloak, got them, and bowing to the party, left it.

M. le Neve lived in the hotel of the Marquis de Layne. His father had scrupulously respected the property entrusted to his care, and had even improved it. There was a long inventory of the valuable articles in it, made ont by the Marquis himself, and this the defunct M. le Neve very frequently compared with them, noticing whatever might be missed or injured, and always repairing and replacing when there was a necessity for it. There were valuable pictures and many objects of vertu, which the Marquis, a connoiseur in his way, had gathered at great expense, and they were all there now. When the young man came home, he could not sleep. He felt too excited for that, so he threw himself on a sofa

and began to think. In truth he was ruined, ruined too in the apparent occupation of means that rendered it quite easy and possible for him to pay his debts. He was nervous. Busy thoughts plied their way through his brain, and at last he sprang up.

"This man is dead," he muttered. "He has not been heard of for years, and will never turn up. I shall try it," and then he took out his note-book. "About two hundred thousand francs, and there they are. I shall convert these things into money at once, and pay those people. Why shouldn't I? I'll do it."

He went up and down the room now, noting this and that, and fancying its value. He did not care about disposing of what did not belong to him, as he only thought of the easiest way to raise the money required, and, satisfied that it could be done, at once he determined on doing it. This cooled him a little, and he lay down again, falling asleep soon after.

It was noon when he wakened up. He went then to his bed-room, dressed and prepared himself for action, having previously sent for a broker. After a slight breakfast, he got pen and paper and went through the hotel, noting down everything for disposal, and then speculating upon the value of the place itself. The broker arrived, and after a long consultation they came to an agreement, and the man said, he thought he could get a purchaser for the place. This conference was ended by the entrance of the Curé of Vesoul.

"Ah?" exclaimed M. le Neve, with some bitterness, "this old priest is one of M. de Layne's charities. Good morning, M. le Curé."

"Good morning, M. le Neve," said the priest, gravely.

"It is not quarter-day," asked the other, smiling blankly.

"No," said the old Curé. "It is not that.

When you are alone, I shall tell you the object of my visit."

M. le Neve nodded to the broker, who at once withdrew. He and the Curé were now alone. The young man regarded the latter with some apprehension, believing that he was acquainted with more of the proceedings of M. de Layne, than he was inclined to state. He placed a chair for the Curé and sat down opposite to him.

"Now, M. le Curé, I am prepared to hear the object of your visit. First let me hope you are well." The politeness was difficult, for then he wished the priest in any other place than where he was.

"It is a grave matter," said the old man. "You knew the Marquis de Layne, M. le Neve?"

"I never saw him that I recollect. My father, M. le Curé, did know him, you are aware, most intimately."

"Yes. I shall then tell you an occurrence,

M. le Neve," said the Curé. The young man bowed and leaned forward. "On the eleventh of September, 18—," the Curé began, "in the night, two women came to my parish residence. I was then at home. In the same parish, the Marquis de Layne had a summer residence, more a chateau than a villa. I believe it was an old seat of his family. He and Madame, his wife, had been there some days. I cannot detail events occurring in the house, but I know Madame de Layne gave birth to a daughter there on the eleventh of that month. She died on the evening of the same day, and that house was burned down, her dead body consumed in the ruins."

"I have heard all this, M. le Curé, before," said the young man, hurriedly.

"Patience, Monsieur. I return to the two women and their visit. They brought with them a female infant, the daughter of M. de Layne."

"She died long ago."

"Patience, again, Monsieur. I had no doubt that child was M. de Layne's daughter. The object of the visit, was for me to baptize the infant, and to make such arrangements as would insure her future identification if ever necessary. I did so, and then entrusted her to the care of one of the women, Madame Lucille Williams, French, but married to an Englishman employed here in the British Embassy."

"Well, Monsieur le Curé, but the child died," said the young man again, and this time half angrily.

"No, Monsieur. That child has now grown into a young woman, and is this moment residing at the Hotel de Londres, in this city."

"It is impossible. An imposition," said M. le Neve, gravely.

"It is true, Monsieur. The child of Lucille Williams died, and that poor woman, haunted by fears rising from terrible causes, kept that

secret in a manner to herself. She made a deposition of the death though, but I think it was only revealed to me and the woman who was present with her on the night of the eleventh."

"The Marquis, however, disowned the relationship."

"The Marquis, Monsieur, sought for his child. He was told it was dead, and that Madame Williams had left France after her husband, who had been obliged to fly from Paris to avoid the law. M. de Layne afterwards learned that his daughter lived."

"How, how, M. le Curé?"

"From me. I was his spiritual director. And after he had received that information he left Paris, and travelled for some years over Europe, in pursuit of the man Williams and his wife. That was unproductive of any result. He disappeared then, though I feel he is not dead."

"Not dead?" M. le Neve repeated these words stupifiedly.

"I believe it. For an unseen hand guides his affairs here; and the agent entrusted by him with carrying out the disposition of his property in France has a secret. He never ceases in his enquiries as to the existence of that child."

"Then her appearance, M. le Curé, would bring the Marquis on the scene, if alive?"

"I believe it."

"He would recognize her?"

"I know it."

"There are grave imputations against the Marquis," said M. le Neve, with a cold smile.

"Rumors, yes," replied the Curé with a sigh.

"Facts," exclaimed the young man, seizing, with desperate hand, the only plank that remained from the vessel which he had so hopefully constructed to carry him over his difficulties. "They could be proved. There is

blood to be avenged, and the friends of the late Marchioness would avenge it."

"I do not believe that," said the Curé, calmly. "I know that there were disagreeable reports, but M. de Layne may dread no investigation."

"For himself, if alive, I hope not," M. le Neve saw at once from the priest's manner and tone that he had gone too far. "Let us return to this young girl. She is now in Paris."

"She is, Monsieur: in the Hotel de Londres."

"Is she aware of her relationship to M. de Layne?"

"She shall know it during this day."

"That, M. le Curé, is an unadvised step. You tell her of her father, Paris will tell her more. If she be ignorant now, let her remain so. All her wants can be easily supplied, as the property of the Marquis is untouched, but hide from her the story of her origin. I in-

tend leaving this hotel to night. She can come to it.'

"In what character?" asked the Curé.

"As its owner," said the young man, with a visible effort.

"You thus bring about the event you deprecate. The daughter of the Marquis de Layne has no rights until he restore her. I shall tell her as much as will reveal her origin, and let God direct the rest."

"I would not control you, M. le Curé. You will be guided by your own ideas, which I am satisfied, will conduct you correctly."

"Thanks, Monsieur. I shall wait on her now."

M. le Neve conducted his visitor to the street, and as he left the house, the broker again entered it. M. le Neve remained for a moment at the gate looking after the retreating figure of the Curé, and when about to follow the broker, who still stood a little distance from him in the court-yard, he chanced to

look up in another direction and saw a man gazing intently towards him. The Frenchman saw at a glance, that this inquisitor was a stranger, and he suspected, an Englishman. The occurrence, however, made no impression upon him. He followed the broker, and the porter closed the gate. The young man did not speak for some minutes. A new idea had entered his head. If the residence of this girl in Paris was known, might not it evoke the Marquis, if alive, and he always felt that M. de Layne lived. He could not banish that notion from the moment he had determined to dispose of his property. It was like a halter round his neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PLOT.

While M. le Neve is perfecting his deed of sale with the broker, the latter having agreed to put in keepers and allow the goods to remain in the hotel for a day or two, so as to save appearances, while all these matters are being satisfactorily arranged, the person who had attracted M. le Neve's attention is sauntering about the streets. He has kept up a sort of perpetual wine-drinking and lunching during the day, varying the wine with brandy,

and the eating with pipes or cigars. He has flaunted through the boulevards and along the quays—the Champs Elysees were too cold for him, and wanted excitement—so he keeps near where that is easiest to be had, and is like an infant, gazing in at shop windows, and constantly looking upon everything that seems to him a little out of the way. He is very restless, and no length of time in one place.

When M. le Neve's porter closed the gate, he went away down the street. It was near dinner-hour then, so he determined to dine, and he located himself in the first attractive café that presented itself to him. He was neither very hungry nor thirsty, and he only eat and drank a little, determined, seemingly, to keep his head cool for some purpose. When the repast was ended—it was nearly four o'clock then—he lighted a cigar, and looked at the curious ring on his finger—for the diamond flashed brilliantly in the match-light with which he was touching his cigar—and

then he took to the streets again, but this time straight on, and with a purpose. He traced his way to the hotel of M. le Neve, rang its bell, and when the porter opened the door, requested to see his master.

"Monsieur," said the man, "will find M. le Neve at home;" and so the stranger went in. At the entrance of the hotel he met another servant, who carried his instructions to his master, and immediately after he was conducted to his presence. M. le Neve at once recognized the supposed Englishman, whom he had previously remarked for staring at him.

"Pray, Monsieur," said the young man, "be seated. May I enquire how I can serve you?"

"Not me, M. le Neve," answered the other, in very passable French. "You can serve yourself." In his French that peculiar patois which the speaker had learned from a residence with certain characters in London was forgotten, and he delivered himself like one

long resident in the country, and conversant with its manners. "I have some intelligence that might be useful to you, as it indicates a danger you, I am certain, would wish to avoid."

"You are kind, Monsieur. Might I request the favour of your address?"

"M. Robert Williams."

The young man stared hard at his visitor. "I do not know the name."

"That, M. le Neve, I take to be true. I am many years an older man than you, and acquainted with events in which you are interested, though they must have occurred while you were a boy."

"I am all attention, M. Williams," said the young man, still pondering over the name.

"You have heard of M. le Marquis de Layne?"

"That perpetual Marquis," muttered le Neve. "I certainly have heard of him."

"You do not know that I reared his only child?"

"No, Monsieur." The light was breaking, and the young man saw it all. This was the Englishman who had married the nurse, Lucille.

"Well, I tell it to you, now. I did so, and she is now living and well."

"Where, Monsieur?"

"In London."

"Then I have been misinformed. She died shortly after her birth."

"No."

"She is in Paris then."

"Luce in Paris!" exclaimed the other. "Monsieur is jesting with me."

"She is now, I am informed, stopping at the Hotel de Londres."

"I cannot believe it."

"Monsieur can satisfy himself. I should suppose Monsieur has nothing to add?"

"But I have, though. The Marquis de Layne will turn up, M. le Neve, and an only

child will dispossess those more distantly allied to him."

"M. Williams," said the young man, after a short pause, "was obliged to fly from France in consequence of acts not compatible with his position at the English Embassy. The criminal reports are not destroyed by revolutions."

"That is perfectly true, M. le Neve," answered the other. "I am that man, and I know that the reports exist, though I cannot see how that affects this matter."

"It shows the folly of interference," said le Neve, coldly.

"M. le Neve misunderstands me. I can raise a claim or remove it."

"You can do neither, Monsieur. That young girl this moment knows she is the daughter of M. de Layne. What more is there?"

"Not much," said Rob, rising. He thought this new game was played out. Unaware of

the circumstances of the individual before him, he was mentally cursing that fate which had made a secret he was about to sell of no value. He was near the door when M. le Neve spoke.

"Will M. Williams remain for a moment? He has exercised paternal rights over this young girl?"

"Yes, yes."

"Can he continue to exercise them?"

"He can, and will."

"If he will remove her from Paris for one month M. Williams shall receive two thousand francs: one half on the day she is removed, the other at the end of the month. I only desire restraint for that time."

"I'd cut her throat," said the other, bitterly, "for a little more."

"Let her be removed first," observed M. le Neve, but his face grew very dark and hard looking, and his visitor saw at once that the latter proposition, no matter what might be said, was not terribly disagreeable to the young

man. "You must use stratagem, not violence. I shall not have violence," he added, as if to remove the impression which he almost felt he had created.

"I wouldn't trust myself," he said, savagely, "if she was at all stiff; but I can do it, only I don't know where to take her to."

"That shall be provided." M. le Neve did not seem to like much talk on the subject. "You will call on her?"

"Whenever I leave this."

"Could you possess yourself of her to-morrow?"

"The earlier I begin, the sooner I'll earn the money. I'll try it to-morrow evening."

"Then for a last direction,—I would say again, no violence. You are her father—"

"No. That won't answer now. You say she knows all about herself by this time?"

"True. But she has been imposed upon—deceived. You understand? The Curé of Vesoul is using her. A story. Anything will do."

"Suppose, M. le Neve," said the other, with a terrible emphasis on every word, "I strangled her, and dropped the body into the Seine. Suppose I did that? How much now—how much for that?"

"Death!" answered the young man, gloomily, and yet there was a wavering ring in his tones which told the other—more confirmed as he was in vice—that this desperate supposition had in his mind its relief. He saw there was something wrong. Knowing the position of M. le Neve in reference to the Marquis de Layne, he could account for an anxiety to have no other claimant coming between him and the property which many years' enjoyment had taught him to regard as his own; but he could not well explain the desire to steal Lucille away for a month, without an ulterior intention expressed.

"I don't see, M. le Neve, the great danger in one more than the other."

"Monsieur," said the young man, still

gloomily, "must take his instructions from me. When he has finished his preparations, a place shall be indicated to which he can remove this girl. I do not wish—I shall not see her, and I shall have nothing to do with the enterprise, if there be the slightest approach to violence."

"M. le Neve is the best judge," said the other, now rising. "I shall not go beyond the letter of his orders."

"It is well, Monsieur," returned the young man, politely bowing, and his visitor proceeded to the door. There were no more words between them then, and when the Englishman went away, M. le Neve fell into a profound reverie. The fine face was almost as much distorted by this silent thought, as it had been with the wild passion and excitement of the previous night's gambling. It was horribly pale and glassy, and his fingers—joined together—wrought into each other, as if they were

telegraphing the thoughts then passing through his mind.

"In a month," he at length said, "I could arrange it all. Then Algiers, England, America,—a thousand places are open to me. A ruined man has no choice, and I'm ruined." That was the bitter thought. It was now almost six o'clock. He took a large leather pocket-book out of the breast of his coat, and unrolling the bundle of paper it contained, began to divide the notes into separate parcels, a business which was only interrupted by the punctual arrival of one of his creditors.

The Curé of Vesoul had just quitted Lucille. He had told her everything he knew, leaving her in doubt and fear. He could not make revelations as to events entrusted to him in

his spiritual character, and he did not allude to rumours which might come to her ears, for after his disappearance, M. de Layne's character suffered from reports injurious to it. She had learned the great fact then, that she was the daughter of the Marquis de Layne, but whether he was living or dead, was beyond her knowledge, and the Curé could not assist her. The disposal made of his property was also told to her, and her visit to France had just been productive of the disquietude resulting from the acquisition of information neither profitable nor pleasant.

She was thinking over all this—gloomy enough then—without much hope for the future before her. The past had been a hard ordeal, and the future only promised delay and disappointments. On one point she was determined. The Curé had induced her to believe that her father was still living. She would know the truth if possible. There was no pleasurable sensation excited within her

upon the discovery of her noble birth, for she would have been more delighted in the anticipation of meeting claimants for her affection who could hold out their arms to receive her without dreading that the imputations resting on them would sully her, no matter how humble their position in life might be. She was thinking then over all the revelations of the last few days, when a servant brought her a card. "M. R. Williams," was printed upon it.

"Ah!" she murmured, "discoveries increase. This is the name the Curé mentioned to me." Then a fear seized her. "It might be. One of them escaped. It must be he." But all action on this supposition was prevented, for the door was opened before the servant could learn her instructions, and the Englishman who had been with M. le Neve entered at once.

"You can leave," he said hurriedly, addressing the servant.

"No, no. Yes. Go." She resolved to meet the danger alone, and then with a pale

face, she turned to him. "Will this persecution never end? But you have no power now. Thank God, you have none now." The visitor was Rob.

"Never mind that, Luce," said the man. "I don't intend it, even if I had. I shall, before this time to-morrow, be away to Marseilles, on my road to New York, and I only want to do you a good turn before I go."

"Well. How have you known I was here?"

"M. le Neve told me. You heard that out of the lot taken on that night in London, one got off. It was in the papers, and you heard it, I suppose."

"Yes."

"I was that one, and I made Paris safe as you see. I was here before, and could speak French well, and now I intend to drop crime and slang and live like an honest man."

"That is well," she said, briefly.

"I'll begin it too by making some atonement to you. Those low ones over there

corrupted me, but I was once rather decent in my way, so I'm polishing up again, and may be decent once more. The Curé of Vesoul has been with you, and what he may have told you I don't know."

"All that I wished to learn," she said.

"Very well. Had you a letter from him to-day?"

"No. I saw him."

"I'll confess all. I'll do it," he said half aloud, and then raised his voice, as if he had not wished her to hear what he had spoken to himself. "Do you see, Luce," he went on, "I didn't know you weren't mine, till after you went to that Lampton's. There was an old letter from my wife somewhere, and I thought I had read it long ago, but my way of getting on did not leave much time for that, so I left it among other papers and forgot it, till you challenged me and said you didn't belong to me. I read it then, and found you were right."

"You knew that long ago."

"I did, but there was so much temptation about me, that I couldn't confess it then, for I was in all sorts of difficulties. That young one, Lord Shapland, had a bit of paper against me, that would have sent me across the water, and so I had to work for him."

"You did that."

"Yes, Luce, that's true, but those things are over now. I am here to bid you farewell, not to persecute you."

She was thankful for that, and she said it. "I won't disguise from you, that any cause which separates us is a relief. I owe you nothing. When you believed me your child, you had no regard for me, and when you found I was not yours, you plotted my destruction."

"True, Luce, that, every word of it. I deserve nothing but reproaches at your hands, still you will forgive me, won't you."

"God pardons in reality," she said, fervently.

"Turn to him, not to me. I still owe you too some thanks for your care of my childhood."

"No, no, Luce. I am leaving you now, wiser."

"Better, better in heart, I trust. Think of the past." She looked hard at him, and his face was darkening. "There was blood shed at Beechcroft."

"There was, but not by me," he said this sharply.

"Then thank God for that."

"Don't preach to me, Luce. I can't stand it. I'll repent, but I must not be driven to it. You must talk to me that way no more."

"Take your own guidance then," she said.

"I shan't see you again," he observed, after a pause, "so let us part as friends. Won't we?"

"Yes."

"Good bye to you. If we meet again, you won't know me. You'll be a grand lady, and won't know me. If I were in a difficulty now, you wouldn't come to me?"

"I would. I would assist you where I could."

"That just makes me a greater ruffian still," he said, with great seeming bitterness. "I may want you, but not now, for I go to-morrow; but God knows only, I don't, when the day may come. So I'll leave you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye." She held out her hand to him, and he took it in his own, pressed it fondly, and then rushed out, seemingly much moved.

"Thank God for this deliverance," she said, when he was gone.

"That un knows too much," he muttered, when in the street. "I don't feel just safe with her hands round my throat: and if that le Neve would pay—" It was a terrible, hideous thought, too dark for him then to put it in words—so he went on thinking and thinking over it.

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURE AND RESCUE.

Mrs. Lumsden had supplied Lucille with letters to some ancient friends, known when, many years back, she had resided in Paris; but Lucille, intent on business, and finding her discoveries more easily made than she had at first deemed possible, did not yet use any of them. Rob's promised departure was a great relief, and his seeming repentance an encouragement. She could not get rid still of the consciousness that she was accessory

to the crime at Beechcroft, in hiding from the authorities the knowledge she possessed, though rather relieved when she knew that the other members of the gang had been arrested. That night she went early to bed, and, exhausted with the fatigue and emotions of the day, slept soundly. It was late the next morning when she rose.

Well, the day passed away without any visit or interruption. She walked for an hour through the city, not caring much to examine remarkable things or places, and then went to write letters to Mrs. Lumsden and M. Lemayne. To the first she revealed all she had discovered: to the latter, the substance, particularly detailing the events. Even from him she shrank, when thinking that what she had discovered might cover her with more infamy than what he knew. She did not even mention names in her communication. This work brought her far into the evening, and ordering coffee she began to read some news-

papers near her. There was nothing in them of interest, and she was thinking of retiring for the night, when a note was brought to her. She read it,—

"My dear young friend, a peculiar circumstance has brought into my house at this moment, a person in whom you are interested. He is ill, dying, I fear, and always calling for you. Come here, if possible, with the bearer of this note, and if not able to leave Paris then, be here as early as you can in the morning. Break off all other engagements to come. Alexandre Gaudelle."

She resolved in a moment. She should go then. Her dependence on the Curé induced her to believe he would not write that note without grave reasons. She asked for the bearer, and saw a plain countryman. He told her he should have to hire a carriage—as he had ridden in—and to her suggestion that one could be had at the hotel, he only replied, that she would pay four pieces for it, so, leav-

ing all in his own hands, she prepared for the short journey.

In about half an hour after, Lucille was going rapidly through the streets of Paris. It was night now, and the young girl from the interior of her hired vehicle saw the lamps become less frequent, and the stir of the city decrease as she left its crowded thoroughfares. She dreamed of nothing different from the object of her visit, and could hardly notice the road on which the vehicle was driven. It did not go direct, for more than once she fancied that she could still discern the lights of the city, but this must have been a delusion. Two hours or more had passed.

"I shall be there presently," she said to herself, and almost then the carriage was pulled up, and the countryman came to the door.

"Mademoiselle will alight here."

She looked out, but could see nothing that she knew. The place was dark and strange,

a high gateway in front, and in the distance a lofty black gable mixing with the thick trees round it.

"This is not the residence of M. le Curé," she said, greatly alarmed now, and that alarm not lessened by seeing the dark outlines of two figures a little in advance of the carriage.

"He was to wait here for you."

"Send to him then," Lucille said, nearly trembling with fear. She heard the grating noise caused by some one striking a match-light, and glanced rapidly at the two advanced figures. The face of the nearer one was turned towards her, and she could see it plain enough, though muffled. A stifled scream burst from her. She knew Rob.

"May the Devil have it for a match. She has seen me, and there'll be a confounded scene now." This was in English. His companion was French and did not understand it.

"Bertrand is rough," said the Frenchman. "That was a scream."

"Worse still," remarked Rob. I hear wheels coming towards us."

"Mon Dieu! Yes. Where is the key? We must get inside the wall. Bertrand, open the gate. M. le Curé will be displeased waiting."

"I have only the wicket key," said the man.

"Get along then, fast. Mademoiselle will descend," and this person, one of the muffled figures, came nearer. "Be good enough—"

"No," Lucille shrieked. She heard the wheels rolling on, and thought there was the glimmer of carriage lamps in the distance. "This is a deception, a snare. I see him there."

"Who? Mademoiselle will consult her safety better by being quiet, and not screaming," said the man, politely.

"Oh! my God, save me," Lucille called. "I am doomed now."

"Stop her mouth," said Rob, savagely.

"Monsieur speaks," the Frenchman answered.

"Strangle her," said Rob, in French, speaking low and thick, "or pull her out of that. Stop. I'll do for her."

"How?"

You could hear his teeth grind against each other, as he flung away his lighted cigar, and went up to the carriage. "Come out, Luce," he said, loudly, "the Curé is within."

"I see it, see it all," she exclaimed. "You were deceiving me yesterday, and now you have brought me here." The carriage wheels rolled nearer, and she could distinctly see lights. "Help, help," and she shrieked loud as she could.

"Come out, girl, come out," and he clutched at her dress.

"Do not hurt her."

"Pah! Don't you hear them? They're on us. Come out, Luce, come out, or—" but she had seized the side of the carriage window

which was opposite and open, screaming through it, while Rob's blood mounted hotly to his head. "Go round, and make her let go."

"That carriage is beside us," said the Frenchman, in a low, agitated whisper.

"And they will discover M. le Neve here," remarked Rob.

"Pull her out," said the Frenchman, bitterly. "We can carry her through the wicket."

"I can't," muttered Rob. "Hold your infernal tongue, you fool," but now she called louder than before, as a carriage with streaming lights pulled up almost beside her. Rob's hand was raised. Something gleamed bright in it, and the Frenchman crouched down, holding his breath, but before Rob could drop her, or pull her away, a strong hand had seized him.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"Help me, save me for God's sake," exclaimed the young girl, faintly enough now.

"Go along, Monsieur," said Rob. "She is my daughter."

"No, do not believe him. I am not." The Frenchman had gotten through the wicket, while the person holding Rob still kept his hand on his collar, and another, cloaked and shawled, jumped out of the carriage, took down one of the lamps, and advanced to Lucille.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Lord Shapland!" exclaimed Lucille, in wonder and terrified.

"You, you here? Hold, Pierre, hold him," and the young lord ran round the carriage, while his voice, like a death-knell, smote Rob. "Hold him." They struggled. Rob got his armed hand free. It was coming down upon his opponent, when the lamp, pushed forward, received the blow, and the young lord seized the hand that dashed through it, shouting out for the other lamp. Rob made desperate

efforts, while the countryman followed the other Frenchman through the wicket, which was quietly closed, and when the second lamp was brought, he was mastered.

"I have you," cried Shapland, looking at him, just as the light fell upon the curious diamond ring on the finger of the hand he held. "We shan't part now. You are a bold ruffian too, thus carrying the proofs against you so openly."

"It is come," muttered Rob. He was beaten and could not recover; the whole looked so providential, to happen as it did, far away, and in a strange country. Shapland took the reins from the strange horses and bound him.

"I shall take a prisoner into Paris," he said, bitterly.

"Remember, my lord," Rob muttered, but he had turned to Lucille, who was fainting in the corner of the carriage, and the young man

stated briefly to her that his appearance there was an accident. He said he could drive her into Paris, but her father should go as a prisoner. She could hardly reply. Shapland helped her out, and got her into his own carriage. Rob was strapped to the seat behind, Pierre alongside of him, and thus they returned.

"How far, my lord, are we from Paris?"

"About a league and a half," Shapland answered.

"My head is so confused. I cannot understand this at all," Lucille said. Shapland asked her some questions, but her tears prevented reply, and he sank back in the carriage in silence.

They rolled into Paris. Rob was sullen and subdued. He did not speak. He was stupified, and made no effort to escape. To Shapland's question, where should he stop? Lucille mentioned the name of the hotel, and the carriage drew up there. The young lord sent for the

police, and when Lucille, agitated, tortured, terrified, lay down to sleep, Rob was in a prison. She had but briefly thanked Shapland. She did not owe him much, and he felt that.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BITTERS OF LIFE.

Railroad and steam-boat ply their toil again. This time Lord Shapland remains in Paris, but Rob is sent to England, while Lucille comes the day after him, and gets to Sir George Myrtle's as he is bolted up in Newgate. He has lost his spirit and pretensions. Hope left him, when within those dreary walls, beyond which he began to think he would never again go in freedom.

In London the old lady, Mrs. Lumsden, is

just sitting as usual in her chair, while Lord Toddington is dying under an attack of paralysis. His physicians say his days are numbered, but he does not think this himself. In the very arms of death, he cannot banish the hopes of turning age into a perpetual youth, the first and second convictions still play their part but feebly, feebly they do it now.

Hugh Mortimer had chambers in the Albany. In the lull after the parliamentary struggles of a very protracted session Mortimer had not quitted town, though he had many invitations. A rising member is an object of some importance in society, and Mortimer was felt, both on account of his motives, his abilities, and independence. He was thoroughly practical in every way, and that is a quality which is seized upon as an innate national virtue, the English type over the world, whether it be real or assumed. Five hundred practical men scattered over a nation will make it practical too. Mortimer was one of those who

thus give tone and manner to their country, and must sooner or later be felt.

Towards evening Mortimer was alone in his rooms in the Albany. He was a great deal paler and thinner than he had been some months past. A settled anxiety was visible in his face, as if judgment were feverishly wrestling with feeling, and the physical frame suffered from the conflict. He had an open letter before him, which seemed to have been received by that evening's post, and he had read it thrice, and was then thinking over it, as if its advice wanted anxious consideration, or its contents were at war with his own opinions. There he sat then, conversing internally with himself, reading over and over again this epistle, without having come to any determination upon the subject that seemed to occupy his mind. At last he rose, and went out, having first put up this letter with some other papers, into his pocket-book. It was dark when he got into the streets, but the time had

as yet no influence upon them, for they were full and crowded as usual. He picked his way slowly through them, thinking, earnestly thinking, as he went along. The crowds at last began to thin, and he entered more quiet streets. He came to Lord Toddington's door, and enquired about him, and the servant said he was just the same way—not likely ever again to rise—though always saying that he would. Mortimer walked on, and this time stopped at Mr. Mapleton's house. It was a sudden thought this, for he wanted to go to Mrs. Lumsden's, when he thought he would call here, and make an arrangement to meet him in the morning, as he had some business on hand which required their joint presence. This would save some trouble in the morning, so at last he determined to do it.

Florence, latterly, hardly moved out. She was much at home, and unless an occasional visit to a theatre, she saw little outside her own house. There were few parties to which

she would go, though as her father's chief connexion was with city people, she was frequently asked out, but now liked privacy, and almost invariably refused. This evening she was alone, for Mr. Mapleton had not been home for dinner, and she was, according to a custom latterly adopted, lying on a sofa before the fire, given up to her own thoughts, and they neither pleasant nor unimportant. She was conquered by a powerful, unseen enemy, who did not spare, and was leaving traces upon her shining face, and smooth brow. The firelight gleamed over her recumbent figure, resting upon the hand that hung before it, and reflected from the bright hair that had fallen over her brow. She hardly moved, and the door was opened, a foot in the room before she heeded it, and then, raising her hand, she asked, sharply—

"Who is that?"

"I have disturbed you, Miss Mapleton,"

said Mortimer, but she started up at his voice.

"No, indeed. You will relieve, not disturb me," she answered, sweetly. "I had expected my father, but he has not been home for dinner, and you—you are quite a stranger."

"I have been latterly so busy, that I hardly can get time for anything, so from necessity I visit seldom, though were I to consult my own tastes, I should be more amongst my friends."

"And Mr. Mapleton would always be pleased to see you."

"I am obliged by his kindness," said Mortimer, "and I was anxious to meet him upon some business connected with Mrs. Lumsden."

"Well then," she answered, gaily, "make yourself serviceable now by ringing the bell, and then take a chair. You can amuse me until he comes. I expect him here immediately."

Mortimer obeyed these orders, and when

the lights were brought, he found himself sitting opposite to Florence. He never remembered seeing her look so beautiful as she did then. The fire light played on her face, now sparkling and cheerful, while, with a particular knowledge of her charms, she did not much change her position, but lay bathed in the full glow of its brightness, her face turned up to Mortimer's, and the pendant hand near him. He admired the finished and beautiful picture before him, but that was all. It impressed him with nothing beyond the surface. It did not touch his feelings, though had he known the trembling beating of the poor heart near him, he would have leavened his admiration with pity, if not with sympathy.

"I have not seen Mrs. Lumsden these some days," said Florence. "She is well, I trust?"

"Much as usual," answered Mortimer, "though I can't conceal from myself that she

is failing, and she knows it: for she feels the warning, and is setting her house in order."

"Her society," Florence remarked, "was a charm I should have enjoyed years ago. Do you know, Mr. Mortimer, I think the country a bad school?"

"How?"

"It is exclusive, selfish, and retired: the men and women in it wanting contact with a circle whose pursuits compel them to mix more with the world, to rub their small vices and follies out of them. Country people may be simple or bad—their virtues and their foibles become hardened—when the rough touch of the world outside might elevate the one, and eradicate or lessen the other. In the country we learn nothing and forget nothing."

"And yet in these busy scenes we sigh for the very qualities you now decry."

"No, Mr. Mortimer, that is not it. The worn spirit languishes after the ease and retirement of rural life; but the man or woman

anxious for elevation or refinement, find materials in life, not in trees and fields. An isolated community cultivates what is within it, wanting knowledge and experience—a great city can borrow and improve."

"In large societies there is greater vice."

"Grander virtues, too."

"There is truth in that," said Mortimer. "But, tell me, were you not happy in the country?"

"I should have been so," answered Florence, sadly.

"Then you were not?"

"Yes, in a way; but I did not know the world. I pined for what was beyond me: and had I mixed earlier with more extended society, I should have regarded the country as a kindly relief—not blamed it as a profitless school."

"But you are happy here?"

"No," said Florence, softly. "I want more than I possess, and when the heart is anxious

the mind is unhappy." She looked into his face.

"I cannot understand this," he replied, slowly. "I would envy your position, and yet its results, you say, are not happiness?"

"Much of that," she remarked, "is perhaps in myself. I expected, and have been disappointed. That is all."

"The great reality of life," said Mortimer. "It is the fate of all. We are not content while there is anything beyond us to grasp at. To be satisfied with our lot is the primary condition of happiness: to achieve that condition, I believe, is our impossibility."

"It is," said Florence. She again looked earnestly in his face.

"By the way," observed Mortimer, taking out his pocket-book, "I had almost forgotten a particular paper which I must leave for Mr. Mapleton," and, rising, he put a folded paper on the table, while, as he turned back, looking at her, a letter fell upon the floor, and he did

not notice it, nor did she then. "Now, to return to our subject. I am a bad opinion upon this part of the question, for in regarding you, and contrasting your position with that of others, I should almost doubt the possibility of misery, where there are so many sources of enjoyment."

"Even that, Mr. Mortimer, is a source of disquietude. To be discontented, when the world asserts it is your own fault—judging from the outside, which it only sees—rather aggravates the misery of the sufferer."

"I know that," said Mortimer, "and you will pardon me when I speak more from what I think than what I know. The highest head may tower over the sorest heart. But that is not your case."

Florence shook out her sunny hair and raised herself up. Something was about to burst from her lips, when Mortimer's calm, cold, collected countenance repelled her, and she sank back again. A slight sigh was the

only manifestation of wounded feeling. Mortimer saw there was a struggle, and yet he could not divine its meaning. He did not believe in its personal application to himself.

"Well, no," she replied, with a slight bitterness in her voice, "no, that is hardly my case:" then suddenly changing the conversation, she broke into a new subject. "That old Lord Toddington is very ill?"

"Very," said Mortimer. He was thinking over her own manner and recent words.

"Papa told me he would not live."

"There is certainly little hope." Mortimer rose up. "I must see Mrs. Lumsden before she retires for the night, and will call upon Mr. Mapleton in the morning. You will pardon my intrusion at this hour?"

"I should rather thank you for it. One tires of books sometimes, of loneliness ever: so your visit has been a relief."

He said something pleasant in reply, and then went away. When he was gone, Florence

fell back again upon her cushioned lounge. This visit had not improved her contemplations. It had embittered them. She could not wrestle and conquer her thoughts, for up, ever up, they came, mixed with that calm face and its collected look, which never flushed within the attractions of her presence, though she had seen it lighted up under the influence of other charms. A half turn on the lounger brought her eyes upon the folded paper Mortimer had dropped. She looked at it, lazily, for a time, and at last, with an effort, lifted it. It was a note.

"Some correspondent. My dear Mortimer," she muttered. "I must send this to him. Perhaps it is for papa and connected with Mrs. Lumsden's business." She looked towards the table. "No. I see the other paper there;" and then she held it in her hand, and at last rose, and was placing it, never having read a word beyond his name, upon the table, when a letter, a word, attracted

her. "Ah!" She grasped it, held it tight, convulsively almost. There was some noise, and she crushed it under the pillow of the lounger.

A servant came in, Mr. Mortimer having sent to enquire had he left more than one paper for Mr. Mapleton.

"There is but one on the table," said Florence. "Look over the room. It may have been dropped."

The servant could not find it.

"Then," she remarked, "he cannot have left it here."

She rang shortly after, and ordered lights in her own room, then went up to it, closed and locked the door upon herself, drew out this letter from the folds of her dress, and stood almost in the centre of the room with it in her hand, motionless, her eyes dreamily bent upon the written paper.

There are grave moments of doubt and suspense in all lives—moments when we stand

in terror at the contemplation of the acts we are about to commit, and judging them by the world's opinion if done, shrink even when our determination is strongest to perform them. Thus, it was then with Florence. Conscious that she held in her hand, a key to her doubts, she shrank from using it. What would be said if Mortimer knew that she read this letter. But that name, why was it there? She stood long with the paper in her hand without reading it, arguing with herself, debating the chances of secrecy and detection. At last the battle was over. Cold, pale, collected, she had determined to violate the secrecy which she should have preserved. Again she examined the door, listened at it, but all without was still, then opening the paper, she read it.

Some minutes have passed. Florence was still standing by the table. The letter was crushed in her hand. That dark paleness, half shadowed by a black cloud that passes

over the face when the heart is numb and bruised, was on her features. Her breathing was low and indistinct, her hands still pressing the crushed paper, clammy and rigid. She was vanquished, humbled. She could not feel it all then, for the shock was too great. That letter contained the account of Mortimer's love for Lucille; and the proud beauty who had cherished this hope of affection for herself, was spurned for a ruffian's child, and punished for her own treatment of that child.

She bore up boldly still. She took one of the candles and calmly burned the letter, throwing the tinder into the grate, then gazed on the little black heap, a sort of emblem of her own ruined hopes. But feeling would come, not a fainting fit, but terrible heart-heavings that tore and twisted her frame, that convulsive anguish without tears or vent, which tramples over the strong will it has vanquished, and tortures, almost to madness,

before it subsides. And so it was with her. She had thrown herself on her bed, burying her face, and pressing her hands upon her heaving heart. Her frame shook. One other hour of that restless agony would have annihilated her. She felt this, and making a great effort, she sprang up, but all the conflicting elements within were not to be stilled by her mere will, for with a faint scream she fell back again, motionless and senseless.

The candles had almost burned out, when, cold, dead almost, she rose up. Her will was active then. She undressed and lay down. Did she sleep? Not that night.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNPLEASANT MEETING.

The morning came at last. To Florence it brought the calm of despair. She had no purpose. She could not plot, to gain affections, which it was now apparent she never possessed. She could not alter that past, whose review brought her no consolation. It was bitter and depressing, but it was gone, perhaps it might have been different could she have foreseen the results, yet she did not regret her own acts. Her heart was full of hatred towards

Lucille. The latter had stricken her down—had trampled on her. It was a grand, though unconscious revenge, and Florence felt it in all its power and intensity.

The day wore on. She had composed her pale face, though she could not still her struggling heart. Mr. Mapleton was not an early riser, so their breakfast was mostly late, and when Florence went down to see him, she had wonderfully schooled herself, throwing into her manner a languor that harmonized with her colourless face. Mr. Mapleton had news for her.

"Mrs. Lumsden," he said, "is dangerously ill."

"I shall go to her, father," exclaimed Florence. She thought Mortimer might be there, and, like the moth, she would still fly round the dangerous flame that scorched her.

"Yes, Florence, do," said Mapleton, shortly. He was worldly enough to believe that something might result from this.

During the short drive to Mrs. Lumsden's, Florence had time still more to compose herself. She thought over her position, and strove to rouse her pride. She felt hatred, bitterness, despair, within her, but pride was crushed. She had not been wooed or encouraged, and she could only see how those regards, coveted by others, had been unappreciated by their tenderest object. At Mrs. Lumsden's door she was more humbled than before. She learned that the old lady was very ill, but quite sensible. She was then engaged with her lawyer. Florence proposed to wait, in order to see her. She got out, and the servant conducted her to the drawing-room. The curtains were half drawn, and a dark sky without, prevented Florence from at first seeing that another person was sitting in the shade of the window, looking down upon the deserted street. Florence walked into the middle of the room, as the servant closed

the door upon her, and the other rose from the chair, and advanced towards her.

"Miss Mapleton!" It was Lucille who had hastily come to see Mrs. Lumsden, on the first alarm of her illness; and was detained until her lawyer should go away.

"You, you here?" exclaimed Florence, the words coming hissing from between her lips, and she went backwards towards the door, then paused, and came forward again, while Lucille stood confused near her chair. With Florence this meeting was only an aggravation of wounded feelings. She could see in Lucille but a person who had wronged her, intruded on her, defeated her, so she drew up her figure, and looked as contemptuously as she could upon the bent face before her. She was slow in speech, and musical now, when the first surprise was over. "I beg your pardon, Miss," she said, "for my seeming astonishment on finding you here. The vultures,

you know, always flutter near the supposed dying. Mrs. Lumsden is rich."

"I will not understand you, Miss Mapleton," Lucille replied, having gained her composure, and looking straight upon the haughty face before her. "You know you wrong me—have wronged and insulted me."

"Indeed! I never imagined that a young lady of your strength of mind could feel anything I could do."

"I have felt it—and bitterly too;" said Lucille, sadly.

"You were pained, were you?"

"Yes."

There was a gleam of triumph in Florence's eyes. She could not hide or repress it. "It was foolish then, Miss, for you to feel it—foolish to confess it. I have no compunction for the past; and were it to live over again, I would crush you. I would crush you back into the poverty from which mistaken charity raised you."

"Florence!"

"Do not dare to Florence me," and she spoke so calmly and sweetly that her voice was hardly more than audible by her astonished listener. "You have stung me, but I shall see you lowered. Do not think that the credulity on which you have imposed can protect you; for hypocrite as you are, you will be discovered yet."

"I cannot understand you now, Miss Mapleton," said Lucille, excited at last. "You impose upon me and on yourself. Where have I wronged you?"

"In all places, and at all times. You are always against me—always trying your hypocrisy to raise yourself and lower me. You would be a lady, would you?"

"I am a simple labourer, toiling for life's support," said Lucille, calmly. "I would be honest and independent—I ask no more."

"You don't?"

"I have said so."

"Then there is no truth in you. I knew there wasn't. I see it now. Do not speak to me. You have gone puling and moping round this old lady, hoping to gain her remembrance by your servility. You have an object. Will you succeed?"

"I can gain nothing by Mrs. Lumsden's death."

"I think not, though you believe otherwise; and yet stand there lying to me, who know you and your designs."

"This room, Miss Mapleton, is not large enough for both. I shall not remain to tempt your anger."

"But you shall to know my opinions. I do not hate you—I despise, spurn you; and shall yet laugh over your fall. You have crossed me, mark that; and I shall not be defeated by you without having my revenge."

"I?" asked Lucille, astonished.

"You, you. Did I not say so?" and her

attitude became threatening. "You do not dare to contradict me?"

"Intentionally, or otherwise, I never wronged you."

"You hypocrite! I lower myself talking to this beggary in silk. You are quite grand indeed, a lady-governess."

Lucille did not reply. She drew on her gloves and resumed her seat, not even turning her eyes upon Florence, whose flushed face was again putting on its pale tints. She did not proceed in her angry conversation, but began to look at some engravings upon the table, continuing this occupation, until a servant came in, and stated that Mrs. Lumsden was so exhausted by the morning's business with her lawyer, that she would be then unable to see any one.

"You will mention, that I called," said Florence, while Lucille, taking advantage of the servant's presence, was just about to quit the room, when Mortimer entered.

"Ah! Miss Roberts," he said in a low voice, not then noticing Florence, "this is a sad visit. She cannot live. So her medical attendants say;" and Florence could see that he still held Lucille's hand.

"I hope they exaggerate," replied Lucille. "Her mission in life is surely not yet about to terminate."

"It is in the hands of God. Miss Mapleton!" He saw Florence now. "Mrs. Lumsden's woman told me that her mistress was inclined to sleep, so that none of us can see her. I hope you are well, and must apologize about sending so late last night for that paper. I am sure I have dropped it in the street."

"We looked in every place for it."

"I regret the trouble I have given you. Your father and Mrs. Mapleton will mourn for Mrs. Lumsden."

"She will get round yet," said Florence.

"I have no hopes," replied Mortimer, sadly,

and his eyes sought Lucille. But she was gone. "Miss Roberts has left us."

"Miss Roberts?" echoed Florence. "You mean Sir George Myrtle's governess?"

"I mean her."

"I did not know her by that name," said Florence, and she turned to the door, nor did Mortimer by a word attempt to detain her. He saw her down to her carriage, handed her into it, and then returned to the house. For a second his eyes rested on Lucille's retreating figure, far up the solitary street; but that was all. He thought then, more of the old lady whose hour-glass was nearly run out.

Proudly, Florence's carriage swept past Lucille, whom it had overtaken. The young girl was walking slowly on, and she did not raise her head. If she had conquered, she showed no signs of victory. From her half-closed eyes, Florence regarded her with a bitter look, her mind still inflamed and excited against her. A close carriage passed.

It was Lord Shapland returned from Paris, but Florence had not noticed it or him. He saw Lucille walking, and was tempted to stop and address her, but he thought it better not.

When she got to Sir George Myrtle's, she could hardly define the various emotions within her. How had she injured Florence? This thought was ever in her mind throughout her walk. How? She could not answer the question. A man was waiting for her there. He put a summons into her hand to appear as a witness at the trial of Rob and others for the murder of Mrs. Lampton. So the law had not slept. It had tracked out the gang, and obtained a clue to the great crime which threatened the man who once called himself her father. This concurrence of disagreeable events did not tend to assure her or compose her mind, and yet her summons to attend as a witness—a new character, productive, perhaps, of most unpleasant consequences to herself—did not annoy her, or dwell on her

mind so harshly, as the conduct of Florence. She wept over the memory of it, and went that morning to the performance of her duties more disturbed in mind than ever she had been during all her previous trials.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRIAL.

There is great commotion in Mother Fippin's neighbourhood, for the news is current there that four men are this day to be tried for murder, and the frequenters of the old dame's establishment know them all. The pros and cons that support guilt or innocence are largely and studiously discussed, nor is the excitement lessened when it is known that the boy Jerry has been seen with the police during the previous evening, and was taken off by them

that very morning. Wise people say that Jerry was stagged, while the old woman herself is inconsolable in the midst of a difficulty that produces a necessity for a new pot-boy. This commotion varies in a degree the old life of the neighbourhood, and it affords a new topic of conversation, and it has its amicable displays too, reconciling enemies and obliterating feuds in the discussions it promotes. The men are on the move for the Old Bailey, as soon as their breakfasts are over, and some strong-minded females follow them; so that towards noon the place is a sort of Elysium to the policeman, and Mother Fippin does not miss Jerry, as there is nothing a-doing in her line.

In the Court-house a solemnity fitting for the occasion was everywhere apparent. The crowd of spectators was still and anxious; the jury, now sworn, like men on whose unbiassed decision a great issue depended; the counsel on both sides seemed girding themselves for the intellectual display which soon would test

all their abilities and knowledge; while the men in the dock looked as if they were the only indifferent parties present. Rob, the Driver, and Bat were in it. The Bang was absent. Rob had assumed a sort of masked cheerfulness, which his gripe of the wood-work near him rather belied. He looked frequently at the witness-box, in which two ladies, darkly dressed and closely veiled, were sitting. These were Lucille and Lady Myrtle. Sir George had come down with them, and her ladyship remained, as a sort of protection for Lucille. Rob looked anxiously upon these shrouded figures. He knew there was evidence there that could hang him. Near these two, dressed in the most shining of deep black, was Mr. Lampton. He was all in mourning, except the breast of his shirt, and his white handkerchief. His very face seemed in crape, and the smirk which usually sat upon it was gone. He only looked too at the wooden ledge before him—never raising his eyes from

it—and soon contrived, by the well simulated intensity of his grief, to excite a very general feeling of compassion for his sufferings, and Mr. Lampton would have lost his dear wife twice for this result.

The trial began at last. The prisoners in the dock had pleaded not guilty, and the counsel for the crown opened his case. In a speech, circumstantial and minute, he detailed facts which Lucille believed only treachery could have revealed, and now for the first time she missed the huge black head, covered with hair, that had terrified her on that gloomy night at Beechcroft. This was then the channel through which the information had come to the crown. The speech closed, and from its details she could learn the part that had been designed for herself, while all in court felt that if the allegations made by the crown were proved, the prisoners had run their course in this life. Some witnesses were called to clear the way for the grave facts, the

most important of whom was Mother Fippin's Jerry, and he proved the meeting on that evening in the dame's, the departure of four men from the house for the country, and their return in the morning. He had overheard loud words, and he remembered one of them accusing the other for murdering the woman.

"Do you see any of these men here?" asked the counsel.

"There be three on 'em in that ere box," answered Jerry.

"Can you tell which of them accused the other of the murder?"

"It was Bat, there."

"Whom did he charge with this murder?"

"Rob, I heard un say."

The accused looked up coldly at this witness. He did not seem at all dismayed by this statement. A vigorous cross-examination followed, which led Jerry through many early delinquencies, and exposed to a very crowded audience materials for writing his biography, which

spoke more for his cleverness than his honesty. His testimony was still unshaken. It was evident he had overheard the wrangle at Mother Fippin's after the return from Beechcroft.

Another witness was now called. Lucille looked up, and though the beard was cut close and the hair shorn, she knew at once the face that had glared on her that night. This witness was sworn as Thomas Smith. The counsel examined him very cautiously, and drew the main facts out of him with skill. At last he came to his own participation in the events of the night. He stated that it was on returning from a circuit through the house, that he came into Mrs. Lampton's room—that he was hardly in, when a young woman rushed in after him, and that then the blow was struck.

"Who struck that blow?"

"Rob."

"Do you swear it was Rob?"

"Well—I does."

Another cross-examination, and more scenes of desperate infamy in which the witness had taken part, followed now. The men in the dock might be bad, but the witness in the box, was on his own showing, quite deserving of hanging, if that punishment was at all equal to his merits. He, however, stuck to his story. Nothing could shake his direct testimony, and during all his examination, the prisoners never once looked at him. It was felt to be true. He went down, and the crier called Lucille Roberts. Lucille went into the box, and was sworn.

"What is your name?" asked the officer who had sworn her.

"Yes. Speak out, young woman. What is your name?" repeated the counsel for the defence. "You are on your oath now. What is your name?"

"Lucille," answered the young girl, in a low voice.

"Well. What more?"

"I cannot swear to anything else," she said, firmly. "I believe I have been baptized Lucille. I can claim no other name."

"Is your father in this court?"

"I do not think he is."

The crown now interrupted, and after some wrangling, Lucille was regularly examined, but it was some time before she could get over the excitement produced by the abrupt proceedings on the other side. She saw that she was an object of curiosity in the court, and this did not tend to calm her feelings. After some preliminary questions, she was asked—Did she ever see the last witness before?

"Yes. I think on three occasions," she answered.

"State the particulars then."

"I saw him on the evening of the murder at Beechcroft, on that night, and once I think on the street, since."

"Did you speak to him then?"

"No."

"Are you perfectly certain that you saw the last witness at Beechcroft, on that night?"

"Perfectly."

"That will do. Now, gentlemen," and the counsel for the crown sat down.

There was some consultation on the other side, before any one began to cross-examine Lucille, and during this suspense she was an object of eager curiosity. Her remarkable beauty elicited inquiry, and excited speculation. At last one of the defendant's counsel rose.

"Do you see your father in this court?" was his first question.

"No. I believe not."

"Look round you—into that box—amongst those men whose lives you are assisting to swear away, and tell that jury, is your father in that box?"

"I believe he is not."

"On your oath, what is your father's name?"

"I do not know."

"Isn't that man there, commonly called Rob, your father? That man whom you will hang if you can."

"He told me himself, he was not."

"Where?"

"In Paris."

There was now considerable excitement in the court mingled with murmurs and disapprobation. Some believed Lucille. Many did not; and there she sat, the point for remark and censure, and she felt this acutely then. She did not raise her face, but the hot blood was crimsoning it, as she thought of her position, and the situation into which the prisoner's malignity was hurrying her.

"Did this man rear you?" continued the counsel.

"Yes, for several years."

"Was he unkind to you?"

"I do not believe he was."

"Why have you joined with the crown against him?"

"I did not do so."

"Did you see him at Beechcroft on that night?"

"Not that I could identify him."

"Do you mean to tell the jury, that you would not know the man, whom you up till then believed to be your father, if you had seen him there?"

"The room was dark. I saw four men there, and whether he was one of them or not I could not say."

"How did you know the previous witness then?"

"He was in my own room and had a light with him."

"Did he blow it out, when he left you?"

"I cannot tell."

With great skill all the events of Rob's life in which Lucille had been latterly implicated were brought forward, and such a complexion

given to them, as to make every trial she had endured appear as a wilful act of her own. She seemed to have joined him in throwing herself into the arms of Lord Shapland, to have fled to Paris after him, and though the name was suppressed the impression was allowed to gather strength, and few people in court had not conceived an evil opinion of her. With well dissembled sorrow Rob listened to all this. Hang or not he was enjoying his revenge.

"Now, you deny that this man is your father. What proof have you?"

"None but his own word, and the statement of another person."

"Who is that person?"

"A clergyman in France."

"From all that you know to the contrary, beyond these statements, you may be the daughter of this prisoner?"

"No, no, I am not his," said Lucille, despairingly.

"You cannot prove you are not?"

"I cannot."

"Go down then. You may go down."

Some other witnesses were called for the crown, and Lucille hid herself as much as she could in her seat, drawing her veil close round her, while Lady Myrtle seemed absorbed in the proceedings of the trial. The case for the prosecution shortly after closed, and the counsel for the defence rose to address the jury. All that Lucille had endured previously was nothing to her sufferings now. She seemed to be specially marked out for vituperation. Every possible manner of alluding to her was employed, and while the open testimony of the Bang, admittedly present at Beechcroft, was alluded to as the perjured shift of the real assassin to screen himself from the result of his own acts, the counsel dealt almost tenderly with him from the necessity of his position, but upon her was poured the full vial of his wrath. She was not to be

believed. She was a parricide in intention, who, to preserve her own fancied respectability, would, on her oath, deny her own father. This scene would have been rare vengeance for Florence, and in the same strain it was carried on to the termination. When the counsel sat down, having stated that he could prove from incontrovertible evidence that not one of the men in the dock had been present at Beechcroft on that night, the whole sympathies of the audience were with the prisoners, and if Lucille had looked up, she might have seen contempt and dislike glowing on many a countenance bent down on her.

Evidence was called for the defence. It was well concocted and skillfully used, but here and there broke down, and towards evening the counsel for the crown rose to reply. He evidently considered Lucille as but a frail link in his own chain of proofs, for he scarcely adverted to her, more anxious to re-establish his own case, than soften her fate.

He sat down without having removed one bit of the obluquy directed against her. Then came the judge's charge to the jury—grave, calm, and impartial. He summed up the evidence, laid it bare and naked before them, without comment or gloss. From the evidence they should give their verdict, construing their doubts in the prisoners' favour.

The jury looked at each other after the termination of the charge, and the foreman gave the signal for retiring. Their minds could arrive at no conclusion then. A short lull followed now. The crowd released from their attention on the grand events, could trace minor matters with more satisfaction, and Lucille soon saw that she was the most important of these minor events. She could feel, though she never looked up, that she was stared at. She could hear her name whispered round her, and with a bitter fancy could imagine that the crowd cursed her. It was her reward. In that moment of pain and

humbleness, of crushed hope, and bruised feelings, she reproached herself. She had forgotten a duty. She should have denounced to the law, the man who, she believed, violated its ordinances, though he was her own father.

"Silence, silence in the court." These words of the crier, diverted attention to the next scene in the drama. The jury came into their box, and the popular mind commenced to speculate on their verdict, evincing feeling in various ways, and in cases of doubt, making up for want of knowledge, by plurality of bets. The usual formula gone into and concluded, the issue paper was handed down.

"How say you, gentlemen?" began the officer. "Rob guilty of the murder. The others of aiding and being present thereat."

"Jailer, remove the prisoners."

"Take yer time a bit," said one of them. It was Rob; and he held the spiked rail in front of the dock firmly and determinedly. "Rise, Luce."

The young girl rose up, while court, counsel, and audience, became still and hushed; even the grim grasp of the jailer slackened.

"You've hung yer own father, but he don't curse you. He'll pray for yer happiness here and arter. So good-bye, as I doesn't want you to come near me. I couldn't look at you without knowin the weight of my blood was a crushin you. Good-bye." He drew his hands roughly over his eyes, as if he were about to weep, and then said to the jailor—"Now, I'm yer man."

The dock was empty, but that convicted felon had left it almost a martyr. He had a party during the trial. It was now tenfold. That open forgiveness, that manifestation of feeling, those tears, were the grand elements of popular sympathy. "He never did it, he couldn't do it. That man has a heart," and exclamations like this were quite common; while Mrs. Lampton's violent death was forgotten, and Mr. Lampton's showy grief dis-

regarded. The crowd seized the present, and Lucille was of that present.

"Lucille," said Lady Myrtle, "let us go."

"Whither?" asked the young girl, faintly, and, with an effort, rising, while she felt herself tottering on her feet.

"Home with me," answered her ladyship, quietly.

"After this scene, madam?"

"I judge for myself, Lucille; and it is not when the world turns its wrath upon the unfortunate that the generous should consider—they should then act. Come. We must not keep Sir George waiting for us."

"May God bless you, madam." She could say no more; and, heavily leaning upon Lady Myrtle's arm, she passed with her out of the court, perfectly conscious what an eye-sore she must have been to the spectators within it. Back in the carriage, silent, pale, and suffering she lay, Lady Myrtle not heeding her. She had too much tact to disturb the first

agony of suffering by remarks, but kindly she took the young girl's hand in her own, and pressed it gently. That touch of sympathy, of love, and encouragement, brought the tears at last. The full heart broke forth, and the pent-up feelings were relieved.

At dinner, Sir George was stormy as usual. He had no sympathy for trials, so he coursed with soup and stocks, Capel Court and roasts. Asking some careless questions, he gradually lulled over the share-list, and Lucille stole up to her room. She slept but little that night.

CHAPTER XII.

THE THREE PICTURES.

That night passed over. Long and miserable as it was, it had an ending, and Lucille rose and dressed herself. You could see in her colourless cheeks, in her languid eyes, the ravages of the mental torture she had endured. With the morning, came new agonies. She knew that the whole scene of yesterday was in print, that thousands had read it, and perhaps cursed her. It was with a trembling step she came down to the breakfast parlour.

Sir George and Lady Myrtle were there before her. Sir George had the morning papers, but he only looked for commercial news. He did not think about the occurrences of the previous day, farther than to chronicle a certain event. Stock was rising. He hardly wished to know more, and this morning he was in good humor and stormy to a high pitch.

"How are you, Miss Roberts?"

"Quite well, Sir George," she spoke humbly, and thankfully took the chair Lady Myrtle had pulled near herself.

"Don't look it though. I knew they must rise, knew it. What are you for this day, Lady Myrtle?" and as he fell back in his chair, after asking this question, the great voice whirred and echoed through the apartment.

"I can't say anything particular, Sir George," and this was in her ladyship's gentlest tones.

"Buy dresses for the children, then. Miss Roberts, you must have a dress too. We're rich this morning. They're up." This was a

perfect shout nearly. "Give me more tea, for I'm off."

"You might then, Miss Roberts, go earlier to your school-room this morning, and we shall go out afterwards. Have you done with the paper, Sir George?"

"Here it is."

Her ladyship took the paper and began to read it, while Lucille strove to eat some breakfast. She could not do it. The depressed heart had banished all appetite, and she rose up.

"You can take this paper, Lucille," said her ladyship. "We shall all be ready at one."

Sir George had demanded more tea, as Lucille, with the paper in her hand, and followed by the girls, glided out of the apartment. She could hear the great voice rolling through the house, and it rather stunned her. In the school-room the girls began their lessons, and she seated herself, with the paper in her hand. She had not then the courage to open it Minutes

passed before she could unfold this printed sheet, which seemed to her like a page in the book of fate, and during these minutes what bitter thoughts crowded upon her! That paper was a key unlocking past aspirations and hopes. She had ventured to believe that the sun would yet shine unclouded upon her desolate path through life. She had her secret, too, garnered and treasured within her heart, not disclosed to mortal view, for its revelation depended upon events this torturing trial seemed to have rendered impossible. She opened the paper at last. She expected nothing soothing from its contents, and they almost annhilated her. The report was worse than the original scene. All that could tell against her—the cross-examination, the counsel's speech, Rob's last words—all these were accurately and skilfully given, while an exaggerated gloss was so artistically thrown over them, that even to her the scene narrated appeared new. She read it all. The paper dropped from her hands. Its

rustling fall sounded like a death-knell, and her tortured heart beat and beat as if it would burst. There she sat, her half-closed eyes heavily fixed upon the fallen sheet: her parted lips pale, as if stricken with sudden terror: her white cheeks, like bloodless ivory, shaded by her raven hair: and, her hands clasped, her head bent forward over this death of hope, all shattered, torn, annihilated—she sat there, the picture of desolation and despair.

That reported trial has not done its work yet. With the early morning Florence Mapleton was up. She could not sleep, for casually, the previous night, she had heard something of the proceedings of the day, and she was on fire until she would know what had occurred. Mr. Mapleton was not an early

man, and Florence, this morning, was down hours before him, waiting for the papers. At last they came, damp and fresh from the press, but she could not wait. Hastily she tore them open, flung aside those she did not require, and then took up the leading morning journal. With an eager eye she glanced over its contents. Leading articles, foreign intelligence, religious, polemical, political news, were passed over, and she sought the records of crime. Her eye paused at the Central Criminal Court. It glanced down one column, then another. She saw Lucille's name, and it brought a glow to her cheek; and now she sat down, drawing her chair to the fire, and preparing comfortably for the anticipated treat.

She was not disappointed. You could see it in her heightened colour, in the tightly-compressed lips, in the avidity with which she perused the record before her, now almost laughing, as the evidence told for her own

feelings. She had not noticed the time. She had thought of nothing but the memorial before her, more interesting, more valuable, in her eyes, than any other communication could be. She would not lose a word of it for any consideration, and it is read through as a labour of love. At last she comes to Rob's declaration. She reads it twice, and mutters, "Poor man! How he is betrayed." That perusal was finished, but there are tit-bits through it—strong points in the counsel's speech, that amuse Florence, and she reads these over again. She looks, too, for a hidden meaning here and there, and speculates, in her own mind, whether Lucille is not still worse than she seems. She can make no more of it now.

She had begun to think with the paper in her hand. Firmly she held it, and quickly in her mind did she review the secrets it disclosed. Gradually her manner became proud and defiant, as a sordid hope grew strong in her

heart. She flung the paper from her, and looked at it fallen.

"It is a death blow," she said, half aloud. "Let him wed her now if he dare. He will look for no friend's advice here. Let him wed her. He can't do it. He can't. They would point at him in the streets, and perhaps—" A long pause of anxious, troubled thought followed, and her face grew for a time gloomy; but suddenly it brightened up again, and she stood like a young Pythoness with glowing cheek and trembling lip, exclaiming,—"She is crushed at last—down, and down let her remain." This was the picture of exultation and vengeance

Her father now came into the room. She handed the paper to him.

"What's in it?" Mr. Mapleton asked.

"Only that trial." She could hardly restrain herself from saying something bitter. "Lucille was a witness."

"Well?"

"And the man they have found guilty of the murder, and I suppose will hang for it, says he is her father."

"Poor thing!"

"Yes, yes, poor now;" and Florence almost laughed.

It was noon now, and the light of the mid-day falls sombre upon the sick-couch of old Mrs. Lumsden. She feels that death is near her, and she is not unwilling to die. She has done some good in life—not much, she says herself, but a little; so faint and weak as she feels now, she measures the past with her own strength, and humbly regrets the opportunities lost. The old face has lost its quaintness, for her peculiar head-dress is removed, and the Chinese monsters are not in the sick-room

to contribute some of their own grotesqueness to her looks. At her feet the great cat is lying, and on the floor Vesta is doubled up, turning now and then a tearful eye towards the face above her, and sometimes kissing the hand that is within her reach. The acute mind is still vigorous and unclouded, her worldly affairs are all settled, and she has sent messages to some of her friends to come and see her—to take that long farewell of them, when they shall never meet in life again to press hand or lip, and can only look to a future in which soul may know soul, purified and exalted.

Into this sick-room the morning paper has entered. Mortimer is sitting near the old lady, with the paper in his hands.

"It will fatigue you," he said.

"No, Hugh. Read it all to me; slowly and carefully. Your father read well."

"My father?"

"Ah! never mind. I knew him, Hugh,

knew him well; but in death all things earthly perish. He was a dear friend. Read now."

Mortimer had never known this much before. He could now account for some of Mrs. Lumsden's flattering regards towards him. An unobserved spectator of the trial on the preceding day, he had weighed carefully that portion of it implicating Lucille; but he had only her testimony against the criminal's, so he could come at no result. He did not know the object of her mission to France, nor the discoveries there made, for these she had kept as the confidential reports of Lucille. He began to read the trial, slowly, as the old lady required, and she herself lay with half-closed eyes listening to it. It took a long time to get through it, but there was no interruption, for Mrs. Lumsden never asked a question or spoke during it. Mortimer finished and laid down the paper.

"That's it all, Hugh?" she said, opening her eyes.

"The whole of it," he answered.

"I have but one opinion," she said, slowly. "I cannot speak harshly of even a convicted murderer. God sees whether the issue was truly found or not, yet I never could believe that one drop of his blood is in that poor girl's veins."

"You do not?"

"I know it. She was born in France, and her name is yet a mystery which time, a short time too, will reveal. That which it is said belonged to her father, has been told to her, but that father is gone—not dead, it is believed, and until he appears, or positive evidence of his death be discovered, she can claim no rights through him."

"Then that man, even on the brink of the grave, lied?"

"I believe he did. I feel for this girl. Her informant in Paris, bound her to secrecy for a time, so that she could not, unless subjecting herself to difficulties, and I believe

dangers, use that information. She is truth itself, too. I know that."

Mortimer did not reply. He was silent for a long time, and the old lady's eyes, with something of their former glitter, were frequently on him. She was evidently in deep, anxious, and distressing thought. She turned her head frequently from side to side, and grew painfully restless. Still, Mortimer did not speak. A slight moisture gathered on his brow, and his hands locked themselves together, while his head fell forward upon his chest.

"Hugh," at last the old lady said, suddenly interrupting this profound and prolonged reverie, "listen to me." He was all attentive to her in a moment. "I once asked you a question about Florence Mapleton, and you answered it frankly. I am now on my deathbed."

"No, no. You are better," exclaimed Mortimer.

"Ah! Hugh, the lamp is nigh burned out. The hour is near, how near I dare not even surmise; but the darkness is coming fast down. Have no hopes that I shall ever see another spring, perhaps not another day. I am resigned, and thank my God for that, but I should quit this scene more willingly did I feel that I had made one heart truly happy."

"Many, many owe their happiness to you."

There was a light on the old lady's withered brow. A heart-shadow throwing its brightness upon the worn skin, the spirit illuming the clay. "Thank God, then," she said, "but I wish to do more. Hugh, you love this Lucille?"

He started. It was a home question, going to the man at once—a revelation he had hardly dared to make to himself, and it startled him. "I do," he answered, in a low voice.

"You would make her your wife, did she consent, but for her peculiar position?"

"Yes."

"That is honest and candid. I expected nothing else, and am not disappointed. The prejudice of birth!"

"No;" and he interrupted her. "I have no heraldry to point to, or on which to mount that prejudice. I am free from it before God. Were she humble, poor, claiming kindred with honest toil, with any hand not smitten by crime, I would not hesitate."

"Well, well, all that will come in God's good time. She is pure herself, and will claim relationship that shall not sully her. I have no doubt on this, but I have a wish, a hope. Should she, within a year, clear up this mystery, and come before you with unsullied name and lineage, no matter how humble, should she do this, will you offer her your protection and your name?"

"Before Heaven, yes."

"You should have been my own child," said the old woman sadly, and then before he could speak. "Hugh, I was nearly married

to your father, but that is long years past, and if I die not in the arms of my own, I shall breathe my last near the son of one once dear, very dear to me, but now in heaven. Take away that paper. Lucille shall have protection and happiness yet. God will enable me to make yet another happy."

Mortimer lifted up the paper. The old lady turned away her head, and he left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DEATH-BED.

The deep shades of the winter's night had fallen upon the streets, most of them still crowded and flaring with the gaslight. But in those old bye-places, where the great world dwelt when at home, the lamps were few and the light dim. The high houses threw their night shadows over the quiet pavement, which was frequented by few at that hour; the long rows of lofty dwellings, liker then to streets of tombs than the habitations of men. It did

not require the muffled knocker or the tan bark thrown before the door to insure quietness near Mrs. Lumsden's house, as few seemed anxious to penetrate into this region. One carriage comes slowly down the street and stops at her door, then a cab, and then another. The door has been opened—the people get out, and the vehicles are driven off.

Mrs. Lumsden had grown strong towards evening. She was always better then, but had not felt so well for many days past, and yet she doubted these cheering symptoms. She felt that her own intensity of purpose contributed to this appearance, and she also believed her hour was drawing nigh. Her religious opinions were peculiar. She, as yet, had called in no clergyman to pray with or console her, but seemed to rely, in this emergency, upon herself alone. She was now propped up in her bed with pillows, a small writing desk on the table beside her, and round the bed were Mortimer, Lucille, Mr. Mapleton, Florence, Lady Myrtle,

and some other friends, while away in a corner, black as usual, was Mr. Lampton. They sat solemn and gloomy, looking upon the old face, but partially lighted by the candles placed so as to intrude as little as possible upon her eyes. She was solemn and calm, like one taking a last look at old friends whom she might never again see.

"My dear friends," she said, "God is about to provide another home for me, and I have asked you to come and see me for the last time. I could not leave you without wishing to leave some frail memorial of my presence amongst you still with you. To you, Lady Myrtle—Come near me, Charlotte."

Her ladyship came near, her eyes filled with tears.

"Do not cry, dear friend," continued the other. "I knew you a child. You are still the same, with your heart in the right place. There is a locket for you," and she took it out of the writing-desk. "It is filled with the grey hairs

of an old friend, who liked you. Take it. To the unfortunate you have been kind, and your reward will even be here."

Lady Myrtle could not speak. She kissed the old hand, and then turned away her head.

"Mr. Mapleton, your mother was the friend of my youth. She could not be here. That chain was the first offering to me of her early love. Poor Nelly! We shall meet yet. Give it to her from me. That ring is my offering to yourself." She did not say more to him. Mapleton, much agitated, with a trembling hand received these last testimonies of regard.

"For you, Florence Mapleton, the grandchild of that old friend, I have reserved this necklace. It is eastern and valuable. There is a motto on it—'*The proud are humbled. Charity and Love exalted.*' Would that we all practised this precept, and looked for our reward in the cultivation of those kindly feelings that exalt love and charity."

A red glow passed over Florence's cheek.

This was reproof from a dying hand, yet it did not humble her. She started as the old eyes looked into her face for a moment. It was but a moment, and they were withdrawn. She fell back on the pillows, as if wearied, while Florence haughtily glanced at the golden chain in her hand, her look resting for a moment on the plate pendant from it, which contained this motto. She had doubts whether she should keep it or not, but she had not time to act, for Mrs. Lumsden had again risen up on her pillows.

"Mr. Lampton," she said, in a husky voice.

"Dear madam," he could not get beyond that and have time to smooth down his face and dress, so he crept slowly towards her, and assumed his best attitude at her bed-side, black, mourning, and penitential-looking, the scented handkerchief twisted up in his hand, as if he really did not know what he was about. He stood in silence, perhaps a little awed, before this dying woman.

"There is a cross for you," she said. "It recalls the Redeemer and his love. Let it be with you an enduring monitor, and always remember, Frederick Lampton, that we have trials enough in this life—real, heart-subduing trials, which no man of honour or feeling would strive to increase, either to gratify his passions, or please his frivolities or whims. Go and repent of the past."

"But, my dear Mrs Lumsden."

"Here," she interrupted and presented her hand to him. "May God bless you. I am hard, perhaps unjust."

He did feel now. Likely too he was not so bad as his peculiar egotism and vanity made him, for he pressed the old hand affectionately, looked into the withered face, and then, with a loud sob, turned away his head and went out. He was not acting now. The real man sprang up, and, under the correction of those dying lips, flung away for a moment the hardness and

gloss which a worldly, conventional society had crusted round it.

"I was right," muttered Mrs. Lumsden. "I have not forgotten his children." She lay back again on her pillows, and in that attitude distributed most of her remaining presents, all too, of great value—necklaces, rings, and trinkets. There was a quiet endearing tone in her voice that made even trifles acceptable then.

"My dear old friend," said Mapleton, hardly looking at her as he spoke, for he felt the scene and the hour, "you will fatigue yourself."

"I have little now to do," she remarked, drawing from under a little roll of tissue paper a long, grey lock. "This, Hugh Mortimer, is for you. It's value must be in your appreciation of the worth of its once wearer."

He took it. He could not speak, but you could notice the heaving chest and lowered head, and at last the strong man was vanquished. One loud sob—the tears fell like rain, and he

rushed from the room. A faint smile passed over the old lady's face, bathing it in a ray of departing light, and she rose again on the pillow.

"Lucille."

A low voice from a distant corner answered this summons. Florence started. Even until then she had not seen Lucille, and that voice stung her, nor did her manner escape the piercing look of the old woman, as if the eyes had grown strong again to guard what she loved.

"Come hither, my dear." This was the first touch of her old manner. "I would have wished to live to see you enjoy the peace and happiness you deserve, but God wills otherwise, and he judges best. I present you with the contents of that packet. They consist of money, and I exhort you to persevere in penetrating the mystery round you. Be not stricken down by the past, but struggle for the future. God bless you, my child. I would that your hands would be near me in death."

"I shall not quit you, dear madam, for a moment."

"No," said Lady Myrtle, "Lucille shall remain with you."

"Thanks, dear friends, thanks. Come nearer me, my dear. The world is fading fast away, and the night cometh."

They all rose now. She shook them by the hand, each as they came to her, and Lucille had fallen on her knees by her side, and then, with fond, last looks, they parted from her. It was evident she only wanted now to be with those she had chosen to see her last moments, and the room was presently deserted by all but Lucille.

"You, child, must leave me now. I would be alone with God and his minister." So Lucille went out too, just as the door of a dressing-room from the bed-chamber opened, and M. Lemayne glided into the apartment.

Two hours after a faint cry echoed through the house, and Mrs. Lumsden's bell was pulled. Mortimer and Lucille ran towards the room. It was very dark, and a figure, clothed in deep black, was standing near the bed. It glided gently past them, saying, in a low tone, as it went out—

"Mrs. Lumsden will soon be called to God. Pray for her."

That voice! Lucille surely knew it, but before she could act, the servants had crowded in, more lights were brought, and the old woman was visible, buried in her pillows, and seemingly dead.

"The doctor, where is the doctor?" exclaimed Mortimer.

She opened her eyes at that voice. "No, Hugh, no doctors, now;" she spoke clearly, though faintly. "Art cannot give new life to the three score and ten. Where is Lucille?"

"Here, here, madam."

"And, Hugh?"

"Here." They were both kneeling by her side.

"The light fades, the candles grow dim," she said, sweetly, "yet the light above glows down on me. Lucille."

"Madam."

"I hear the voices singing over me. Pray. The pure for the impure— the young for the the aged. Pray."

Lucille was covering with burning tears the cold hand she held, and Mortimer had buried his face in the bed-clothes.

"Weep not, my children," she said. "I go. May the Lord grant me rest. I hear again those soft voices over me. Hugh, your hand. Lucille. Good-bye."

Was she dead? They did not move. But by-and-bye the grasp relaxed, one long, deep sigh, and the spirit had fled. Neither moved then. The servants looked on in tears and dread. At last Mortimer rose. He looked

on the old face, but every feature was calm and composed. There was not a ruffle on the brow, not a contraction, not the trace of a spasm. She was dead. Lucille's head was still buried in her hands, and her spirit employed in prayer, while, nearly opposite to her, the dark figure she had before noticed, prayed too. At last he rose and glided out of the room, unquestioned.

With folded arms Mortimer stood gazing upon the perishable clay before him. A world of thought swam through his brain. He had never understood the peculiar interest Mrs. Lumsden took in him, and he now could remember some indistinct reference to early hopes by his father. That was all over now. She had been to him a mother, and in this violent disruption, by death, of the ties that bound them, he mourned her then as a parent. He could now feel how the thwarted heart bestowed some of its first love upon the object that resembled, or was connected with its own

remembrance of the past, and he had ready gratitude for Mrs. Lumsden's affectionate regards towards him, and painful grief for her loss.

Lucille rose up from her knees. The clay was growing cold now. The last faint traces of the spirit's warmth had almost quitted it, and the hand of death was visible upon the pale features, composed and rigid as they were. She bent over them, pressed a warm kiss upon the bloodless lips, and then sank on the chair by the bedside. Mortimer still looked on with folded arms. He had lost a friend; but the young girl was doubly unfortunate. She was deprived, at one blow, of a parent and protectress.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRIEST AND THE PRISONER.

Mrs. Lumsden was consigned to the earth, her mortal remains finding a resting-place in that quiet village where she had first seen the light. Her will was not to be opened for three months after her death, so speculation amongst those who knew her was rife enough. They were all busy in their conjectures as to her disposition of her property, known by most of them to be very great.

There were some who mourned her loss,

their grief unmixed with one selfish thought, and of this number were Lady Myrtle, Mortimer, and Lucille. Florence hoped nothing and expected nothing, though the Eastern neck-lace was quietly working a revolution even with her. Her feelings were not half so bitter as they used to be.

The morning, next after the funeral, Lucille was informed that a gentleman wished to see her. She was then busy in her school-room, and this stranger was in the breakfast parlor. She could not fancy who it was, and was in doubt as to going down at all, suspecting that it might be Mr. Lampton, and him she did not wish to see. At length she summoned up all her courage, and went down stairs. In the room she found M. Lemayne.

"My dear father!" exclaimed the young girl, overjoyed, and seeizing both his hands. "This is a pleasure."

"To me also, Lucille," said the priest, kindly.

"I have been in London for more than a fortnight."

"And I only see you now, father?" observed Lucille, almost reproachfully.

"Not now for the first time. We prayed together by Mrs. Lumsden's death-bed."

"You were the person who called us up, just before her last moments?"

"It was I, Lucille;" and the young girl recalled the voice she thought she should have known. "Mrs. Mapleton had some little business which brought me in contact with her old friend, and probably she spoke well of me, for Mrs. Lumsden asked me to come that night and pray with her."

This explanation over, Lucille deluged him with questions about the Grange, and every one there. They were all well; and now came his turn for inquiry. He did not know that Lucille had been in Paris, and it was only since he came to London, that he had seen the report of the trial, and learned that his

Lucille was the witness on that occasion. He had a strange fancy for that name.

"I was pained, my child," he said, "when I read the report of that trial in which you were a witness."

"You have seen that, father?" she asked him.

"Yes. I could not understand one answer. Were you in Paris?"

"I was."

"And for what purpose, Lucille?"

"This father," she said, showing him the little heart, "will explain it."

"How? I do not comprehend."

She opened it, and placed the slip of paper in his hand. A moment, and he had read it—once, twice, a third time. A strange paleness shadowed his face, his frame trembled. He looked at the girl, then at the paper, gasped, shook.

"You are ill, father?" exclaimed Lucille, surprised and terrified.

"No, no. It is all over." He looked again at her. "I thought this," he continued, speaking in extreme agitation, "was the symbol of a faith, and it is the depository of a secret. You went to Paris. Did you find the Curé M. Gaudelle?"

"I did, father."

"Well? He could explain this?"

"Yes."

"He told you the names of your parents?"

"Yes, father, he did."

"They were—" The priest hesitated.

"My father, from you I can have no secrets. My mother was dead. My father—"

"Go on."

"My father believed to be dead also."

"His name? Who was he?" asked the priest, vehemently.

"M. de Layne," said Lucille, sadly.

The priest drew back. He shook again, his eyes glistened, his cheeks glowed, and as Lucille, with surprise, regarded these sudden

changes, he became calm again, like a man who had yielded to a sudden sensation, and then curbed it lest he should be disappointed. He was now still and placid.

"Tell me," he asked, when his own manner had even calmed down Lucille, who was growing as agitated almost as himself, "what did M. Gaudelle say of this de Layne? Had he known him?"

"He spoke little of him, and that little hesitatingly."

"It was not well then? Of what did he accuse him?"

"Of nothing."

"When had he heard of, or seen him?"

"Many years ago. He did not believe him dead."

"You then returned to London?" asked the priest, pursuing that other subject no farther.

"After some personal danger, I did."

"What was it?"

Lucille then briefly related the circumstances

connected with Rob's capture, but she could afford no information as to the cause of the attempt upon herself, or who were its promoters. M. Lemayne listened to all this calmly, perhaps if you could have contrasted his previous manner with his coldness then you would have said, carelessly, as if not interested in the affair. He changed the subject, began his inquiries as to Lucille's prospects, and learned her determination to follow up the investigation, instigated as she was by Mrs. Lumsden's last words.

"I am going," said M. Lemayne, "in ten days to Paris. Do not quit this until then."

"For your protection and counsel, father, I would willingly remain much longer."

He parted from her then affectionately, and promised to call often. His words and his manner left their impression on Lucille. She had never seen him so much moved in all her intercourse with him before, for he was proverbially calm and collected, and the cause

troubled her. It mixed with her duties in the school-room, and never left her mind during the day.

The last sentence of the law had been pronounced upon the guilty. The Bang was away to Australia, and Rob, lying in the convict's cell, waiting the passage of the few days that then intervened between him and eternity. He never entertained a thought of escaping in life from that dark cell, but another horrid feeling mixed with his daily self-communings. He kept it to himself. He had no confidant in this abode of horror. In his cell he sat brooding and thinking of the past, not with a feeling of repentance either, but with a terrible condemnation upon himself for leading a life that should conduct him to such an unfor-

tunate conclusion. He hardly regretted the commission of the acts that had forged bolts and chains and a dungeon for him, but he did regret their results. Above all this, rose one terrible feeling, not the dread, but the disgrace, of being hung. He was not afraid of the rope and the pain, but he trembled at the display, the infamy, and the enduring stain that would be reflected on others. His name he had concealed, yet it might creep out, so he would not hang to satiate morbid appetites, or satisfy injured laws. No, he would not hang.

His cell-door opened slowly, and the jailer announced a visiter, this interrupted his thoughts.

"Well. Who wants me now? Can't a poor fellow be let die in peace?" He had dropped most of his slang, taking a higher position in his prison than he had done without it. "Who is it?"

"Can't say. Here he is anyhow."

Rob looked up, as his visiter entered.

"Who are you?" he asked, savagely.

"M. Lemayne, missionary priest, stationed at Pulsford Grange," said the other, gravely.

"I didn't send for you, did I?"

"No, you did not."

"Well then, I don't want you. I'll die orthodox, and use the man that's paid for packing me up to go to the other world."

"I did not come to offer you a creed. I came on other business: though you once had a wife who would have received a priest in her last moments."

"What do you know about her?"

"I once saw Madame Lucille Williams," said the priest, calmly.

The prisoner sprang from his bench. "Who are you? But there is no use in that, for they didn't call my wife Williams, nor Lucille neither."

"Yes. She was French; and you, when a servant at the English Embassy, in Paris, married her. I know that."

"Suppose you do, then,—what more?"

"That woman," said the priest, "died. Her child died; and you, when almost on the scaffold, claimed as your daughter one not of your blood."

"She is, though," answered the prisoner, doggedly.

"Man!" exclaimed the priest, sternly, "you will be soon before your God. Do not lie, even while his hand is on you."

"What is it to you, whether I do or not?"

"You left France with another child—your wife died in England, and that child, where is she?" asked the priest, not heeding his question.

"I don't know—I don't care."

"It was one person's interest that she should not live. You murdered her?"

"I should have done it," said the prisoner, bitterly; "but I didn't though, and it's a regret with me now. I would have been paid for it, and safe."

"M. le Neve could not have saved you," observed the priest.

"Oh! You know it all, do you? Well, no matter. What more do you want? You have M. le Neve to look after, not me. They'll do for me, here, so you needn't mind; and as to Luce, she'll get on; though I think I hit her, too."

"You strove to do it, but failed. Her father is living."

"The Marquis de Layne?" Rob stopped, suddenly.

"Enough," said the priest, coldly. "This girl is the daughter of M. de Layne, and your instigator to the outrage on her, was M. le Neve."

"You knew it before?"

"My opinion is confirmed now." He was moving towards the door.

"Priest," said the prisoner, sinking on his bench, "they will hang me."

"The justice of man has decreed it," and M. Lemayne turned to him.

"I do not care for that. I do not heed rope or gallows for myself."

"You dread disgrace?" said the priest, anxiously.

"And you possess my name and history. You will disclose it?"

"I am not bound to secrecy." M. Lemayne paused. The convict looked anxiously in his face. "I shall not reveal your name on a condition."

"What is it?"

"The history of your connexion with this girl, and with M. le Neve."

"You promise that—promise it by your religious character."

"I do," said the priest, solemnly.

"Come nearer, then." The priest drew close to him. "My own life is nothing to you, Priest, so I shan't bother you with it. I wasn't very fortunate some twenty years ago,

in Paris, just after my wife's first and only child was born, and I did some little acts not then liked by my employers, though I was but striving to imitate them. I heard a secret and sold it another, and when there were no secrets to sell, I thought of other matters that came across me. I had to run, anyhow. My own child died, and my wife brought another with her. Whose it was, then, I hadn't time to inquire, nor did I think of it till long after, and then Luce was dead. I called this child Luce too, all along for a time thinking it my own, and when I found it didn't seem to care much for me, why I didn't mind it, and was glad when one night it left me."

"That was when you had planned to rob Pulsford Grange?"

"Just then, and I never saw Luce again, until I met her by accident in London. That is the truth, priest."

"I would now refer to M. le Neve," said the priest.

"He only wanted to keep Luce out of the way for a month."

"Is that month past yet?" the priest eagerly asked.

"No. It wants some days to it."

"He would rob her," said M. Lemayne, bitterly.

"You will keep my secret?" asked the prisoner.

"I have said it," replied M. Lemayne.

"Then go," said the other, sharply.

"You do not think of God?"

"Go," reiterated the prisoner, and M. Lemayne left him.

That night Rob was found dead in his bed smothered. No man or woman claimed kindred or connexion with him, and his name was buried in the grave with his dead body.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONFERENCE WITH A RESULT.

M. LE NEVE had quitted Paris. That unseen agency which so vigilantly guarded the affairs of M. de Layne, whether he was living or dead, had detected the transaction between M. le Neve and the broker, and had applied, and obtained power, to stop the removal of the property. This was done in the name of one of the charities which received an allowance from the deed of disposition of the Marquis, and so much delay was effected as to prevent that

precipitate arrangement on which M. le Neve calculated. The broker began a suit for the restitution of the money advanced, and in the mean time M. le Neve slipped through all their fingers and fled from France. He was now in England.

The intelligence of Rob's death had been conveyed to the parties whom it might interest through the same medium that the report of the trial had come to their ears. It terrified Lucille. She could have no feeling for this man so persecuting towards her, and yet this death, violent and unexpected, though it saved the disgrace of a spectacle which might frighten and annoy her more, had something so hideous and startling about it, as vehemently to affect her. Strange, that with Florence, it was a relief. The Eastern necklace and its talismanic motto, were working a slow, but decided revolution. The past was beginning to sting the young conscience that had dared

to disregard it, and in that death was Florence's first show of regret.

"It will relieve her," she said to herself. "Poor Lucille! She has suffered, and that too, from hands that should have guarded her. The old woman was right. Charity and Love shall be exalted."

A few short hours had made a change here. They could not eradicate the love felt for Mortimer which was never returned. They could not bow down at once that proud, youthful brow; but they had shown good symptoms, and Florence encouraged these symptoms.

M. Lemayne was frequently with Mr. Mapleton, whilst in town, and although earnestly invited to make his house a residence during his stay, he had not been able to do so, as his business kept him constantly too far from that part of the city. When in Florence's presence he never alluded to Lucille, and it was in Mr. Mapleton's that he first heard of Rob's death.

"It is a blessing for Lucille," said Florence,

earnestly; but M. Lemayne was solemn and depressed.

"The verdict of the coroner's jury," he at last remarked, "is, FOUND DEAD. It was suicide."

"How, father?"

"I saw and talked with that man, not many hours before his death. He dreaded the exposure of the scaffold, and has smothered himself. Long years of hardened crime remove the remembrance of God."

"They do," said Mr. Mapleton.

"I shall call and see Lucille," remarked Florence, leading the conversation back to her. "Her trials have been many, her consolations few."

Mr. Mapleton looked sharply at her. He remembered then, how on former occasions Florence had not been so charitable to Lucille; but he did not make any remark in reference to this change. That day passed over. M. Lemayne had evidently very serious business

to occupy his attention, and he did not return that evening to Mr. Mapleton's.

In his chambers, at the Albany, Mortimer had spent the day. He did not know Mrs. Lumsden's intentions in her will; but before she died, she had entrusted him with various commissions, whose performance was now a matter of duty and love. During this pre-occupation, his busy mind often, unbidden, reverted to Lucille. Often too did he voluntarily think of her. He could not banish this helpless, unprotected young girl from his mind. She was always before him. The evening came and much of his business was in a forward state for the morrow. It was during one of the pauses incidental to continuous occupation, that a letter was brought to him. In it he read the following—

"Sir,—The young girl known to you as Lucille Roberts, is not the daughter of the unfortunate man lately tried for murder, and yesterday found dead in his cell, at Newgate.

I enclose you a baptismal certificate, and the certified copy of the registry of the parish in France where she was born. Her birth is not obscure, and her father will claim her at the proper time. At present family arrangements delay this act. He watches over her, and is able to guard her. I may also state that he believes his duty requires that the first intimation of this fact should be made to you from your personal connexion with that now alas! deceased and most charitable lady who evinced such unfailing interest in the fortunes of Lucille."

It terminated without signature or address. Mortimer minutely examined the certificate. He saw it was authentic. He saw also that Lucille was acknowledged in it as the daughter of the Marquis de Layne. Who this unknown correspondent might be, was a complete mystery to him, but there was an air of authority and truth about the communication, that impressed its import upon him. He did

not doubt it for a moment. The next question suggesting itself to him was, whether the young girl knew this fact herself or not? and then should he communicate it? Two important considerations were these. That night was considerably spent before Mortimer retired to rest; but he had decided, and slept well and calmly on his decision.

Lucille was never more intent upon her duties than she was now. She owed everything of late, when Mrs. Lumsden was gone, to the kindness of Lady Myrtle, who never by word or act, seemed to have given any proof of change towards her. She was now kinder than usual, looked after little matters that she never before attended to, and spent a good deal of her time in Lucille's schoolroom. She had gone out this day, and Lucille was agreeably surprised by a message that Mr. Mortimer was waiting to see her in the drawing-room. She came down at once.

"I hope," said Mortimer, "I have not in-

truded upon you, as I fear this visit is made during the hours of duty."

"Lady Myrtle leaves me so much to my own judgment, that I can hardly say I have any fixed hours of duty."

"Last night," began Mortimer, "that paper was forwarded to me," and he handed her the letter. "It concerns you alone, and I thought it my duty to submit it as speedily as possible to you."

Lucille thanked him, and took it. She read it carefully and calmly enough too, then folded it up.

"Mr. Mortimer," she said, sadly, "this document corroborates my previous knowledge."

"And did you," asked Mortimer, surprised, "know this on the day of that trial in the city?"

"I did, but I could not demand a parentage before the crowd, which a living father refused to accord to me."

"How did you know that then he knew of your existence?"

"That is his only excuse. He knows now."

"And he acknowledges and will claim you," said Mortimer, kindly.

"The mercy of God, hitherto kind and consoling, will support me," replied the young girl, fervently. "I am free from the odium that a connection with the unfortunate dead would have produced, and can now go quietly and satisfiedly on my way through life."

"Should this Marquis de Layne never appear?"

"Then I shall pray for him."

"But there are other ties," said Mortimer, moved, "which we make in life, and which atone to us for the loss of all other relationships —not ties of blood, but sanctioned by our affections, and more enduring than the other."

These were the first words in that strain Mortimer had ever addressed to Lucille. He had frequently evinced great pleasure in her

society, and had perhaps unintentionally exerted himself to captivate her; for he was not the one who would seek to make an impression for the gratification of the hour, but he had been careful in his words and conduct, only on very peculiar occasions allowing the interest he felt in her to exhibit itself for a moment. She wondered, naturally, at that language now.

"Some," she replied, "are fortunate enough to make such connexions. I do not believe I shall ever be of that number."

"Why? You have youth, beauty, intelligence, all those qualities which we know stir men's hearts to love, and why utter that opinion?"

"Because the past, Mr. Mortimer, leaves me little room for hope, and the future presents but a vague promise."

"Listen, Lucille," said Mortimer, kindly, "and I shall relate a little of the past. A man who had formed little connexion with the other sex in his walk through life, having

most communion with men and books, as they were oftenest in his way, saw a young and unprotected female like you battling bravely with life, and he saw her raise up friends for herself by her virtues and merits. He admired that girl. He could not close his eyes to the excellence that marked her quiet way, nor his ears to the encomiums that were in the mouths of some that knew her. Still he made no very warm advances towards her. He checked his natural impulses. He kept back the warm beatings of a heart that loved her. He did that for many months."

Lucille was growing agitated now. Was this allegorical or real? "He had sufficient reasons," she said, in a low voice.

"No reason, but one," continued Mortimer. "He believed that reports he had heard were true. He did not know they were false, and while he would have chosen his wife as his heart willed, no matter how low her origin, if she could hold up her face, and say to the

world, 'we are poor, but not criminal,' that man could not choose for his companion in life, a daughter against whose father or mother the hand of the law was then levelled. Do you blame him ?"

"I could not," said Lucille, calmly. "He was right in shunning a contagion that must have adhered to him through every year of his after-life, and clung to his name."

"He thought that. But afterwards, altered circumstances made changes also affecting him. A great crisis rose in that young girl's fate. The law seized her parent and took his life. She was alone then in the world."

"The living offspring of the dead criminal !"

"Yet," said Mortimer, "she would no more dread him now. His death had conferred upon her comparative freedom. The sting was drawn, broken, and thrown away."

"And the wound still remained," remarked Lucille.

"No. Time and care could heal that. The

first barrier to this man's hopes was broken down, and then he received intelligence that overthrew the rest."

"What intelligence?" asked Lucille.

"That," he replied, pointing to the letter.

"Then I—"

"You, Lucille," said Mortimer, passionately, "are the heroine of my tale. I loved you as warmly, when I never believed I should dare to reveal that love to you, as I do now. I have been sincere, perhaps blunt with you, and do not hesitate in avowing that I might have gone to my grave with my hidden love untold, but for that paper. I do not demand your regard as the price of a falsehood."

"And you are right," exclaimed the young girl, "right, Mr. Mortimer, in that. I would never have consented to bring disgrace upon an honest name."

"But now," continued Mortimer, "all that is past. You have a name which brings no improper recollections with it, and if this father

claims you, it is well, if not, under the protection of a husband, you will not require his services. I have a fair name and an honest love to offer you."

"Ah! Mr. Mortimer," said Lucille in a low voice, violently agitated as she spoke, "you do not contrast the greatness of this offer with my condition;" and still there was a visible pleasure in the young girl's eye.

"Stay," exclaimed Mortimer, suddenly. "What an assumption I have made! Lucille, I said, I loved you, that now for a long time past I had admired and respected you. I speak only of my own feelings. I did not think of yours. Vainly and presumptuous enough I tendered my own love, and seemed to think that offer sufficient, for I did not ask yours in return."

"You have it," said Lucille, ingenuously.

"Then we shall not hesitate," exclaimed Mortimer, taking her hand. "I claim this as mine." She did not withdraw it, and the door

opening, a servant admitted M. Lemayne. They both rose in some confusion, but the priest did not seem to notice them, for he advanced with his usual grave manner.

"I had a letter from the Grange this morning," he said, "and Mrs. Mapleton is still inconsolable for her old friend."

"They were long acquainted, sir," remarked Mortimer.

"Yes. I want M. Dumergue's address, Lucille," continued the priest. "I should know M. Dumergue."

Lucille supplied this information at once. "He is not long over in this country, sir, I believe," she said, for she noticed with all his gravity of manner and profound mastery over himself, that the priest was agitated, "and he is here very often with Lady Myrtle, who has been most attentive to the whole family since they came from France."

"It must then, be the same party," ob-

served the priest, " and I shall call upon them as soon as I conveniently can."

The conversation then changed. M. Lemayne was evidently restless and impatient, and yet he did not seem to wish to go. At last it struck Mortimer, that perhaps he should quit, for M. Lemayne might have some important communication for Lucille, so he went away. Lucille could not misunderstand his look.

" Mr. Mortimer," said the priest, " I thought out of town."

" You know him, my father, then ?" replied. Lucille.

" I saw him at Mrs. Lumsden's."

" He brought me those papers," continued Lucille, " read them."

" These documents, Lucille," said M. Lemayne, " are quite satisfactory, if one only could see M. de Layne. I have no doubt he will turn up, and if not, you are free from the incubus of that criminal connexion which

must have made your past life a misery, and might still have embittered its future. You—" The priest stopped.

"Lucille!" exclaimed a voice.

"Florence, Florence!" said the young girl, who saw it all in a glance.

"Yes, Florence again," and the two girls were locked in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD LORD'S DEATH.

Hugh Mortimer walked briskly away from Sir George Myrtle's door. He had another visit to make, and he called the first cab that he saw, to take him to Lord Toddington's house. The old nobleman was not yet dead. He was in the last throes almost of existence, but he would neither admit to himself, nor to others, the possibility of death. Mortimer rumbled along, not much heeding how the cab shook him, nor indeed thinking a great deal of his

visit, for his mind was more intent upon Lucille and his own future than anything else. He felt a strong sensation of contentment and satisfaction within himself, and did not think his progress half over when the cab stopped.

In a superb bed-room, where gilding, and silk, and art, carpets of the rarest material, and furniture of the most beautiful pattern, had contributed both to please the eyes and meet the wants, the old peer was lying. You could hardly see his shrunk face, twisted too with paralysis, it was so buried in the soft down pillows, though you might observe that his whiskers were as black as ever. His figure was hardly traceable under the bed-clothes, now that nothing but the real man was there, for his lacings and trappings, and all his impositions, were gone; and there he lay, a shuddering, whining mass of worn-out humanity. Nurses were constantly flitting round the bed, hurried a little, and often surprised by the peculiar revelations disclosed by his

lordship's second voice. He could not be persuaded he was dying. He could not take that consideration into his mind at all, and when anxious friends called upon him, and with precipitate zeal expressed their fears, the old lord stormed with passion.

Mortimer got into his bed-room. He had some difficulty in finding himself. He could see a twisted and ghastly face, circled with a line of beautiful black hair, and that was all.

"How is your lordship?" asked Mortimer, in a low voice.

The old man's mind frequently wandered, and though he suffered no great pain, he was dying from the weight of years, and his numbed faculties required pushing before they were completely roused.

"Eh? eh? What's wanted? Who is it?"

"Hugh Mortimer, my lord."

"I knew that. How dark they keep this room! How are you, Mortimer? I'm doing well, getting over this thing fast." He paused

and fixed his bleared eyes hard on Mortimer. "I wonder what that old harridane left him?"

"You delight me," exclaimed Mortimer, "with your good account of yourself. Some people were saying that you were very ill."

"That I should die? I know it, Mortimer. A cursed set of croaking busy-bodies that whirr round every man's sick-bed—Ugh, ugh. Where's my drink?" It was put to his lips. "Don't have nurses, Mortimer, if you're sick, women I mean. Get boys, men, anything. Don't have women. You can't have them when wanted. There now. Ugh, ugh. Where's my handkerchief?"

"Here," said Mortimer.

"The watchers are always taking away whatever one leaves down. Well, Mortimer, how are you getting on?" The talking had nearly tired him, and as he wiped his face, he spluttered out—"Has he been after this Florence, I wonder?"

"Why, my lord, I see little change. One's

duties and pleasures are nearly always the same thing, and with me few events occur to vary them."

"Wait till I'm up, Mortimer, and I'll make varieties for you. I'll—" Here desperate coughing interrupted his further conversation, and Mortimer, alarmed, rang the bell. He was nearly choked, and they had to half-raise him up, and then the coming night was visibly written in his face. Mortimer could see death there. The fit was at last over, and he got round again. Motioning the servants to leave, he went on. "Something went wrong there, Mortimer, and I'm easily made to cough. Indeed, in my best health latterly, I coughed a good deal. But I was saying, I would make some amusement this winter. You'll be getting married, you will. The fellow's very deep." This was hardly audible to Mortimer.

"I might, my lord," he said, laughingly.

"Was thinking that, always believing you had that in your eye."

"But then," said Mortimer, not relishing this conversation, on what he believed was the brink of the grave to one of them, "every thing is so uncertain here, that we can promise nothing to ourselves. Death only is sure."

"Who spoke of death?" asked the old peer, sharply.

"I said, that death only was certain."

"Then I don't want to hear anything about it. There's nobody comes to see me, without doing me more harm than good, and when I expect an hour's pleasant chat, they are sure to make themselves disagreeable by talking about wills, and priests, and death, as if any one was going to die." He half covered his face with his hand, as if quite indignant and grieved at such conduct, and then from between his fingers, came—"What does he want now? Doesn't know I made a will long years ago?"

"It is a proper subject, my lord," said Mortimer, calmly. "I only mentioned the word

as an illustration; but with the sick, death should be a subject of contemplation more actively than with the living, while it never should be absent from the minds of any."

"I don't want swaddling, Mortimer. I shan't have it. I'm not going to die"—but the word nearly choked him, for his coughing was now terrible, and the nurses had to hold him and moisten his lips while this fit seemed endless. Again, however, he recovered from it, but desperately stricken, for he lay writhing and panting for many minutes, and Mortimer turned away his head unable to look at the scene. "Now you see, you see, what you have done," he at last broke out. "I was nearly choked there because you would talk nonsense."

"I won't do it more," said Mortimer. "I thought my remarks correct and made them."

"But you didn't apply them to me? Eh? Did you?"

"Not directly."

"You don't think me dying?" He was half out of the pillows now.

"If man dare judge," said Mortimer, solemnly. "I do not believe, that you will live this week out."

"That I'll die?"

"I hope not, but I fear it."

The old lord rubbed his eyes. His second convictions came first this time, for he said very loudly. "He's mad. I need not be angry. He's quite mad," and then he looked earnestly at him. "You're an odd comforter, Mortimer," he went on. "But never mind, I shall ask some people for dinner this day week, and I'll head the list with you, so we'll see—" and now he talked lively and was planning for the future, not seeming to think death dared approach him, though the terrible coughing should have been a warning. Mortimer could get him at no serious point, so he went away.

That was Lord Toddington's death-bed, for

Mortimer had hardly reached his own home when he was mortally stricken, and had become speechless. Human aid could do nothing for him. He was dead before midnight, and no other names were ever added to the list for the coming dinner. He would not believe he was dying. For years he had led an artificial existence, hooped, jointed, stayed, supported, dyed and made up, fancying that seventy-six could ape the airs and undergo the labours that were lightly felt at thirty. So death took him unawares, and art was powerless. The poor worm could not wrestle with the hideous giant, and Lord Toddington fell to pieces, a poor frivolity that had lived and fluttered its unimportant hour upon a stage where it neither inculcated, by example nor precept, gained blessings nor curses, for its failings were poor mockeries, its virtues none. It was the example of that class which lives for itself alone, and dies unknown.

CHAPTER XVII.

M. DE LAYNE.

Lord Toddington had been disposed of. The double mind was no longer to be expressed in after-sentences, which were being coined as the tongue was giving voice to the very opposite opinions. He was gone, and there was no void. His property, strictly entailed, went away to a distant heir, and perhaps when the mutes and mourners had returned from his funeral and laid aside the insignia of their purchased grief, all memory of Lord Todding-

ton had also departed from the world he had left.

M. le Neve was in London, and if he could have by any means gotten back to Paris he would have been there before this. He saw from the promptness and energy of the proceedings taken on behalf of M. de Layne that some powerful agency guided and directed his affairs. He had also in London the unpleasant sensation continually racking his own mind that he was traced, watched, somebody always on his footsteps striving to find out his pursuits, and seemingly determined never to lose sight of him. He had this sensation always, and he could not well account for it, though he was perfectly convinced in his own mind of its truth. It annoyed and troubled him, increasing his anxiety to get back to Paris.

Several visitors had come up to London, and Lady Myrtle held a small reception to introduce them to some of her city friends. Lucille had to assist her ladyship and did not know

who had been included in her invitations. Amidst of her labours too, her mind was engrossed by the new position in a way cast upon her. She remembered her interview with Mortimer. Dinner was over, the children sent away for the night, and Lady Myrtle was ready to receive her friends. Lucille had some other duties still on hands, and it was hours after when she came down to the rooms. There was a small crowd, and Lucille rather surprised saw M. Lemayne amongst them.

"Florence is here, my child," said the priest, who had come over to her.

"Where, my father?"

M. Lemayne led her to Florence, and the two young girls retired into the recess of a window.

"I have more to tell you, Florence, still," said Lucille. "The most important event is not yet narrated, and I can have no secrets from you. Mr. Mortimer—"

"Mr. Mortimer," Florence repeated the name.

"Yes. He came some days ago, and was the bearer of that certificate I showed you. He asked me—" Lucille hesitated.

"Well?" Florence was growing cold and hard.

"To marry him—" whispered Lucille.

"You?" exclaimed Florence, all her old impetuosity and pride of manner springing up again. "You? He did not! No, no!"

"Florence!"

"There, it is all over," gasped Florence, "all. Forgive me." Lucille pressed her hands. "It was a heavy punishment, but deserved. Come we shall get into the crowd."

"Who is that?" Lucille asked, pointing to a young man near Lady Myrtle.

"That," said the priest, who was near her, and, unobserved, heard the question, "is M. le Neve."

"Who is he, father?" asked Florence.

"A gentleman from Paris," answered M. Lemayne, moving away.

The evening wore on. Mortimer had come, and now Florence saw how all was settled, for his attentions towards Lucille were rather constrained—those towards herself freer than ordinary. She saw that there was no reserve with her, though a little with Lucille. It was altering their positions. After a while the rooms began to thin. In one apartment was a whist-set, of which M. le Neve was one. The priest was in this room. Lucille, Florence, and Mortimer came into it shortly afterwards. Sir George and M. Dumergue were talking together near the table.

"I don't believe it, M. Dumergue," said Sir George, in his grandest notes. "I know we are represented as sending bottled porter and clay pipes as presents to our sweethearts, and then selling them when they become our wives: but I don't believe in this open poisoning. It isn't British."

"Your papers proclaimed its truth," replied M. Dumergue.

"They—Bah. You had a Laffarge in France—a Brinvilliers."

"And Sir George," said M. le Neve, turning towards him, "there are many criminals as great as either, who are never discovered." This was spoken in French, for M. le Neve did not speak English very well, though all the others did. "In Paris there are curious histories, could they be known."

"That is the fate of all great cities," said Mortimer, in French; and after that it was carried on in that language. "Multitudes of men produce multitudes of crime."

M. le Neve glanced peculiarly at Lucille. "I think," he said, "it is true. The most extraordinary case I know is that of the Marquis de Layne."

"What of him?" said M. Dumergue, while Sir George looked uneasy. "Is he not dead?"

"I do not know. Four weeks ago I was

compelled to talk about him, and then the peculiarities of his case were discussed."

"What were these?" asked M. Lemayne, coldly.

"He has been dead, by report, for twenty years, though some say he is still living," continued M. le Neve. "He was married to a very handsome woman, whom, it is reported, he abused."

"How?" asked M. Dumergue. Lucille was a breathless listener. She was leaning against Mortimer.

"By imputations, then tortures, and at last —It is a report—"

"M. le Neve does not compose it?" said M. Lemayne.

"No. He poisoned her draught, which was to be administered at stated times, according to the physicians."

"Terrible! He was tried?"

"No. She died. He had her in a country house, some leagues from Paris; and had so

arranged that the house should be burned."

"But the fire was extinguished, or the dead body taken out?"

"Neither. The flames consumed all."

"It was terrible," said some one. Lucille was pale as death, M. Dumergue very troubled looking, and Sir George, seemingly in great uncertainty.

"That man is dead, or was there any examination into these grave suspicions?" asked M. Lemayne, coldly.

"None. He left Paris. The matter died away, and I believe him dead," answered M. le Neve."

"He is not dead; I know him;" said the priest, solemnly. All looked astonished now.

"Where is he?" asked M. le Neve.

"Here," answered the priest. "I am M. de Layne." Lucille gasped for breath. She was tottering in Mortimer's arms.

"My father!" she exclaimed, feebly.

"My child!" and he solemnly embraced her.

"Your father would have claimed you sooner, had he been able to discover you; but God willed it not." He held her in his arms. "M. Dumergue, do you know me?"

"I do, M. de Layne."

"Sir George Myrtle, I may appeal to you?"

"I believe you to be the Marquis de Layne."

"As to M. le Neve's tale," continued the priest. "I can only say that I am amenable to the violated laws of my country, not to the calumnies which interest or ignorance may produce and propagate. I shall go into the past too for a history."

"My father," said Lucille, in a low voice, "let us forget the past."

"M. le Neve, my child, began his history to wound you. I shall state the truth. He is a gambler, has dissipated his own and would rob you. M. le Neve knew you lived, while he strove to sell, as his own, the property whose profits he used, although itself should

have been a sacred trust with him. This is true."

"M. le Neve will account with M. de Layne, when he appears," said the young man, rising. "M. le Neve does not admit that the Father Lemayne and the Marquis de Layne, are the same." He bowed round and left the apartment.

There was a pause now, and they all were silent, looking at each other, the cards on the whist-table, lying as they had fallen from the players' hands. Florence broke this silence. She drew Lucille towards her.

"I congratulate you upon this happiness."

"And I," said Mortimer, "hope it will be permanent."

"Yet," said the priest, withdrawing his arm from her. "Lucille only wanted a parent without crime, and now she finds one pronounced to be a murderer."

"No, no, my father," exclaimed the young girl, passionately. "I do not think of an idle

calumny like that. Your life has been too long before me, for the thought ever to cross my mind."

"Every man," said Sir George, in his loudest voice, "has his enemies. Bah! we cannot think of it."

"That is true," added Mortimer. "Malice often frames crime, and society condemns without trial. M. de Layne, this sudden revelation may cause changes not anticipated."

"In you?"

"No. Against me."

"Be satisfied. Your happiness for the future, I trust, shall be as permanent as your virtues should make it. My son, be satisfied, that none save yourself can interfere with you."

There was a general move amongst them now. Mr. Mapleton had come for Florence, not being able to attend her in the early part of the evening, and after a few unimportant

remarks—for he saw something peculiar had happened—they all broke up.

"Florence," said the priest, to Mapleton, "will tell you a history in your drive home, which may interest you."

"What is it? You are coming with us."

"No. I shall share Mr. Mortimer's cab which is in my way." He turned to Lucille, and embraced her, then relapsing into all his old gravity and solemnity of manner, he joined Mortimer.

Mapleton's was nearly the last carriage. "What is this story, Florence?" he asked. "Something has happened, I see."

She told it all, circumstantially and correctly, much to her father's surprise; and when they had reached home, they had not half canvassed its details

"What could have been his motives to embrace the clerical profession, and live as he has for the last fifteen years?" said Mapleton.

"Motives. Man's motives are often known

only to God," answered Florence. "I could assign no cause."

Her waiting-maid entered, with a note for her. She knew the writing. It called up a faint blush, but she did not then open the letter, and they separated for the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WILL IS OPENED.

Florence came down the next morning with that little note in her hand. She had examined herself fully and scrupulously during the night, and she found within her many altered sentiments, that before she did not allow existed. Mortimer's open declaration to Lucille had broken down the last hopes peculiar to that delusion under which she had been labouring. She believed it would be a crime to love him now, and with that belief came

many opinions not before indulged in. Her love for Mortimer was a passion without cause. She had thrown her heart away unasked, and the offer of love on lip and eye so often before him, was not even noticed, so steeled against her, or careless, he was. Pride was coming to rescue her from disgrace, not an unseemly pride, but a healthy honest sentiment, and she welcomed it.

"I forgot to mention," said her father, "that I saw Lord Shapland yesterday. He has improved latterly, and has many good qualities. He promised an early visit to see us."

Florence did not say anything, nor did her father notice the little note still in her hand. M. Lemayne called immediately after breakfast. He talked freely over the past, explaining to Mr. Mapleton every circumstance connected with his past life. He and Mapleton went away together, and Florence was now alone. She took a book and read until a visiter came to disturb her. This was Lord Shapland. He

came forward timidly, but Florence met him half-way.

"I ventured to write to you," he said, in a low voice.

"That is my answer," replied Florence, frankly offering her hand to him.

"As long as I live," said the young lord, pressing the hand within his own, "this noble confidence shall not be abused. Dear Florence, you have saved me from misery and despair."

"I shall hope," she replied humbly, "to be worthy."

Could Mrs. Lumsden have seen this, she would have rejoiced over the power of the talisman she had bestowed upon Florence. It had contributed to work this change in her, by evoking dormant feelings, and infusing a new life into them. The two now sat together, talking of their past, and even hazarding conjectures upon the future. They had no subject but themselves, yet it was large enough

to keep them occupied until Mr. Mapleton's return.

He received Lord Shapland warmly, and after some general conversation, the latter requested a private interview. He shook hands with Florence, and then followed her father into another apartment. The result of that interview was satisfactory to all parties.

While all these matters are going on, Mr. Dawes, Mrs. Lumsden's solicitor, was writing invitations, in his best hand and style, and forwarding them to various persons, whose presence he requested in his office, the following day at three. The time had elapsed for opening the will of his late client, and Mr. Dawes had followed the instructions he received before her decease with the same fidelity he would have done were she still living. So he was preparing these invitations, and soon had them all ready for despatch. Mr. Dawes had no great personal interest in

the proceeding. He was guided by his feelings of duty alone.

Well, the night came and went. The notes were all issued. To many they brought peculiar sensations, to some they brought no change, for they expected nothing, and thought it was only a form. The morning passes away also, and Mr. Dawes, now that the time is near, draws his arm-chair nearer the fire, in his own well-carpeted, and nicely-furnished private office. He has been sitting there, thinking over a large sealed parcel upon a low desk near him, or perhaps looking over the empty chairs, and speculating how by-and-bye they will be filled. He is roused from this, by a very tremulous tap at his door.

"Come in," cried Mr. Dawes.

A very small man, wearing a long, blue-body coat with very bright brass buttons, and black trowsers, just a little too short for him, holding in his hand a new hat, and pushing it far before him, either to make room for

him, or to show more conspicuously its freshness, advanced a portion of his body into the room upon this summons.

"Mr. Dawes, I s'pose," said the visiter.

"Yes, yes. There's some mistake here, though," began the solicitor. "Who might you be?"

"This calls me Joseph Bunce, Esquire. Now, I an't an Esquire. I'm still only a pieman, an would be described, vos I hindicted, as a labourer, which I doesn't wish.

"Did you know Mrs. Lumsden?" asked Mr. Dawes.

"I did, an a blessed old lady she was, always mild, like the chief a-goin to sentence a feller to be tucked up. She took the tears out of me when she spoke."

"Did you know Miss Roberts?"

"Well, if she an't an angel!"

"You can sit down, more that way," and he pointed to a distant chair, on which Joe

had hardly deposited himself, when Mortimer entered.

"Mr. Dawes—And—why, Joe, how are you?" and Mortimer shook him so warmly by the hand, that Mr. Dawes proposed he should come nearer the fire. "How is Mrs. Bunce, Joe?" continued Mortimer, who was as much surprised at seeing the pieman there, as any other could be.

"We're all well, sir," said Joe. "Lively, I might say. There an't un on us sick or hungry, and that same's somut these times, cos they're as hard as the face of a hinsolent commissioner."

"They'll improve, Joe," answered Mortimer, and before he could go farther, Mapleton and Florence entered. Then there were Lady Myrtle and Lucille. By-and-bye some others, and Mr. Lampton brought up the rear.

"I believe," said Mr. Dawes, looking over his guests, "those parties Mrs. Lumsden wished present at the opening of her will,

are here now, and with their permission, as this day is the one desired by her, I shall open and read the document."

There was a faint, whispered assent from all present.

"I shall only give the substance, ladies and gentlemen, dispensing with technicalities as much as I can. Mrs. Lumsden desires all her debts to be paid. She then leaves to Florence Mapleton, ten thousand pounds."

Her father warmly pressed her hand. Though, truth then to tell, Florence did not care much about it.

"To Lady Myrtle the same sum, her ladyship having the use of the interest during her life, and then the principal to be divided amongst her daughters, as she may wish." Her Ladyship bowed her head.

"There are now bequests for servants," continued Mr. Dawes, "which are not important. The next legatees are the two daughters of Mr.

Lampton, and they divided five thousand between them."

Mr. Lampton almost sobbed. He was quite overcome by this touch of regard.

"To Joseph Bunce."

"Well, sir," exclaimed Joe, not well knowing what he was about, untill Mortimer laid his hand on his shoulder.

"The testatrix leaves," said Mr. Dawes, one thousand pounds."

"To me, to me, sir?" asked Joe, nervously,

"To you," said Mortimer.

"To Lucille, commonly known as Lucille Roberts, Mrs. Lumsden leaves a life interest in forty thousand pounds of three-per-cent. stock, with the reversion of the principal to Mr. Mortimer, his executors, administrators, or assigns. The said Mr. Mortimer is appointed sole executor and residuary legatee under this will."

Mr. Dawes had read many other bequests, but as they affected parties not in any way

alluded to, they are not mentioned. What wealth came to Mortimer's share could only be guessed at, though Mr. Mapleton had a random idea that it must be very considerable. Mr. Dawes alone knew. He shook Mortimer warmly by the hand, while Lady Myrtle turned to Lucille.

"You are independent now," she said.

"I am, madam, and can afford to be grateful."

"I expect you," continued Lady Myrtle, "to remain as my guest, until you make some arrangements for the future."

Lucille expressed her warmest thanks, and then Mr. Mapleton congratulated her upon her good fortune.

"I," said Florence, "need not congratulate you. For I think now you feel I am rejoiced at your luck. Let me tell you a secret." Lucille bent her head forward. "Lord Shapland called this morning."

"And you?" asked Lucille, nervously.

"I accepted his proposals."

"You were right," said Lucille. "He will guard the happiness entrusted to him."

"I shall take care of that myself," laughed Florence.

There were many congratulations amongst the legatees, and Joe Bunce seemed fairly to be forgotten, when he felt a very soft hand put into his own, and looking up, he saw Lucille behind him.

"I shall call, Joe, as soon as I can. In the meantime don't keep your good fortune from Mrs. Bunce."

"It's all over then, Miss?"

"All for the present, Joe;" and the pieman, making his best bow at Mr. Dawes, left the apartment. They all broke up now, Lucille going away with Lady Myrtle. At the house, she found her father. He listened quietly to her recital of her good fortune.

"It is well," he said, slowly. "I rejoice in your luck, my child. To-morrow, I shall leave town for some days, and in the mean-

time, I must send some papers here for safety. I cannot see you again until I return." He took her hands, strained her to his breast, kissed her forehead, again pressed her in his arms, and then left her. She thought she saw tears in his eyes, and his whole manner was strange and impressive.

In the evening, a large parcel came, directed to herself, and with it a letter, in her father's hand. She read the following—

"I have found you but to leave you. In the papers sent to you, are all the proofs necessary to establish your succession to my property in Paris. You will have no difficulty in managing this, more especially as my own agents will transact the business for you. An honourable man has also claimed you as his bride: so with wealth, friends, and the affection of a husband to guard you, there is little here for which you can wish. I sacrifice all. I lose the pleasure of your society, the happiness of every day seeing the object of our

love. But I could not remain near you. I could not endure the terrible pains which your presence would some times evoke. I could not think of the past and you together. I am gone. God will guard you. He will pity me. To his care I commend you, and may his protecting eye never desert you. This is the last prayer of your father."

Lucille read this letter twice. She then put it in the fire, and fell fainting on her chair.

CONCLUSION.

A TWELVE-MONTH has elapsed, but no efforts can trace the Marquis de Layne, although in that time Lucille has succeeded to his property, and from papers it is discovered that he does not wish to be followed, that his disappearance is quite voluntary. Lucille and Mortimer are married, while down at the Grange Nelly has her grand-child with her, and is quite determined to spoil her husband, Lord Shapland. Mr. Lampton is about entering into the matrimonial market also, and every one is scattered about, here and there. Death has removed many, pleasure or whim carries away the others. Sir George and Lady Myrtle are at Cheltenham, and the mistress of the house where they lodge

always believes that the Baronet uses a concealed speaking trumpet.

Mr. Dawes had paid Joe Bunce the thousand pounds, and Joe, depending on his luck, had adventurously dared a grander street and shop, striking out boldly into the ham and bacon trade. It was a bold venture, but Joe looked forward to success, and Joe did succeed. The old gal is spruce and trim. She has many good customers, carriages often stopping at her door, for there are friends outside who take pride in their struggles for respectable independence. Joe, too, has made a trade of his own. He's quoted amongst lawyers clerks and does a good business there. Of the little Bunces, the girls are at a day-school, one of the boys on a foundation, where Mortimer placed him, and the other has a taste for his father's line, and is in the shop with him.

Two years after M. de Layne's departure, a terrible pestilence was devasting a small village in the East, where two monks for some time had resided. One of them was old and rather

feeble. The other middle-aged, strong, and indefatigable in his labours during the visitation amongst the inhabitants. Both had gained their esteem. The younger man was almost idolized by them, and he did not spare himself in ministering to their spiritual and temporal wants, when he could. At last he too was stricken down by the pestilence.

"Brother," he said to the other, "the hand of God is on me. I shall never rise."

"God is merciful. Pray and hope."

"He is just also," said the sick man. "I would receive the rites of my Church."

A long time was spent in prayer. The stricken man confessed, and received the holy communion, and then fell into a half-sleep. The aged brother knelt by the side of his pallet, his lips moving in unceasing prayer. At length the other awoke.

"Brother, I am dying."

"God will have mercy on you."

"I hope in it. Brother, you will write that I died. You will send the proofs."

"All, my brother, all," exclaimed the old man, grasping his hand.

"God, brother, will pity me."

"On all, who repent, God will have pity."

"Even on sinners like me."

"On worse, my brother, than you."

The dying man smiled. There was hope in the look he turned on his friend. "Pray his mercy upon the soul of the Marquis de Layne. A great sinner," he murmured, clasping his hands, and looking earnestly towards heaven,—M. le Neve was—was—" The lips only moved now. There was no sound.

"My brother," said the old man, "I shall pray;" but the Marquis was dead. "Ah!" he sighed, and eagerly looking on the rigid face before him, exclaimed, abruptly—"The trial is over. God will accept this atonement."

The instructions, left by the dying man, were followed; and Lucille in time learned his death. His memory was honoured. All suspicions had perished.

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